

A MYSTERIOUSPRESS.COM BOOK



GEORGE BELLAIRS

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George Bellairs



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OPEN  ROAD

INTEGRATED MEDIA

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“Already linked ... to a fell adversary, his hate or shame;
Which infinite calamity shall cause
To human life, and household peace confound.”

(Paradise Lost)

“I know thee well; I heare the watchfull dogs
With hollow howling tell of thy approach;
The lights burne dim, affrighted with thy presence:
And this distempered and tempestuous night
Tells me the ayre is troubled with some devill.”

(Merry Devill of Edmonton, 1631.)

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THE BEGINNING OF THE MATTER

ONE afternoon in the late autumn of 1938, the large, flashy car of Mr. Solomon Burt (né Bernstein) came to an unexpected halt on the London-Brighton road. The uniformed chauffeur sprang out, opened the bonnet and diagnosed a choked jet. Whereat Mr. Burt gave him a week's notice for carelessness, left him with curt instructions to put the thing right, and climbed out to stretch his legs. He had been trying to buy and sell a lido at Brighton that morning and had failed on both counts. His temper, therefore, was foul. In the London property market Mr. Burt had a reputation for shrewdness and a good eye for a bargain. He possessed, too, uncanny foresight in his purchases and in ferreting-out the means of financing them. As a result, in seven years he raised himself from the desk in an estate agent's office to a sumptuous suite in Park Lane and a net income of twenty thousand a year from rents alone. Nothing was too small or too large for Solomon. One day you would find him buying rows of slum property in White-chapel or Deptford with a view to turning them over at a paltry profit of ten pounds a house. The next, you would see his name in the headlines as the purchaser of some West-End pile, intent on sweeping away with a stroke of the pen and a gang of demolishers, centuries of memories and associations which cluttered-up an admirable site for "improvement." He had long grown weary of making offers for the Royal Parks and St. Paul's and other city churches, but increasing riches only whetted his appetite for further deals and developments.

Once on the trail, this hunter of land and profit-rentals was relentless. Sentiment, public opinion, protest, hallowed memory, revered history were of no account to Mr. Burt. He entered the world without any restrictions of tradition, breeding, family or name and so he was determined to continue until he was satisfied that he was wealthy enough to assume the responsibilities, vast estates, armorial bearings and synthetic ancestry of a gentleman.

We meet Mr. Burt on the way home from one of his rare business defeats and it is hardly a good time to make his acquaintance. His small, thick-set, paunchy body bristles with annoyance. He pushes his felt hat, which looks just a shade too large for him, back on his head and discloses a broad, low forehead, from which his thin black hair has long receded. Beneath his heavy eyebrows his little brown eyes bulge aggressively. His face is round and his complexion is red and healthy-looking. Only the lines beneath his eyes and the thin veins in his fat cheeks tell of excesses for which he will have to pay one of these days. For the rest, his nose is remarkably straight considering his origins, but a bit fleshy at the base; his lips are wide and abundant; his chin is losing its contours by doubling itself; and his neck is thick and short. He is well-groomed; dressed in a formal black jacket and grey trousers, with a spotted tie and a cream shirt setting-off the lot.

Mr. Burt stands in the road and looks challengingly about him. He knows quite well where he is. He is always travelling to and from Brighton, dealing, preying, or else gallivanting for week-ends with a lady friend. He takes a cigar from his case, punches it bellicosely with a small golden tool, lights it with a gold lighter, and wonders how to kill the time.

The nearest station is Meadford, a small country place a mile to the right, where main-line electric trains halt on their ways to and from the coast and London. Probably the job on his car will be finished before he can reach the place.

To the left, a signpost proclaims that Harwood is a quarter of a mile away. It thus dodges the main road by a few fields' distance, thereby saving itself the disfigurement of petrol-pumps and cafe signs, and avoids the endless roar of traffic.

For want of something better to do, Mr. Burt flings his hat in the car, mops his angry forehead and strolls along the Harwood by-road.

The chauffeur raises his sweating face from the entrails of the car, glances at the receding back of his employer, spits in the road and snarls. Then, he pours a string of horrible obscenities into the bonnet.

Meanwhile, Mr. Burt has forgotten his troubles. His frown has vanished, a light shines in his eyes, he pauses and looks to left and to right and scans the distant scene. He halts and ponders. He might be a modern counterpart of Gilbert White, resting in not-too-distant Selbourne, meditating on some new fact or phenomenon for his journal of natural history.

But, Mr. Burt is not soothed and refreshed by the autumnal glories of nature. He is ruminating concerning the pros and cons of building several blocks of bungalows in the immediate neighbourhood, just by way of a little mental exercise. He surveys fields, hedgerows and surrounding views in calculations concerning lay-out, drainage, road-charges and proximity to the London main line. His meditations are not complete when he reaches Harwood.

The place is only a hamlet but it is a little jewel. It is lost in huge chestnut trees and is composed of a score or so of cottages, a post-office, an inn, and a church and vicarage. Until the family fell on evil days, it was populated by workers on the estates of the Harwoods, who lived at the Hall standing in its park nearby. Now, the natives, unable to pull up their ancient roots, still hang on to the old hearthstones, but seek their livings here, there and everywhere within walking or cycling distance from home. The Hall, a Georgian dwelling, is in several acres of tree-studded grassland, on a site formerly occupied by a smaller building. It owes its existence to the prosperity of Robert Harwood, a whig banker who flourished under the first George and whose grandson squandered the family fortunes during the Regency, thereby condemning their legitimate descendants to live on mortgages. Theodore Harwood is the last of his line and manages merely to exist thanks to the intermittent cheques of his distant relatives, the Harwood-Conklins of New York, who still acknowledge their allegiance to their penniless family chief in the Old World and like to think of the continued existence of their ancestral home, pictures of which proudly grace their penthouse. Their munificence does not, however, pay for more than food, drink and the services of one old housekeeper, and Mr. Theodore spends his declining days in petulantly and agedly fumbling with piles of unpaid tradesmen's accounts and unsatisfied loan-interest demands.

To amuse himself, Mr. Burt is rapidly valuing the old cottages in the centre of the slumbering village and installing electric lighting and modern sanitation when his eye catches the Hall, looking at its best, with its long, regular frontage and straight chimneys framed by a gap in a line of chestnut trees. He likes the look of it and after pausing to ask a roadman concerning distance from the station, drainage, soil, water, lighting and ownership and finding the answers to this standard estate agent's catechism satisfactory, he approaches the big house.

The Hall is not so attractive at close quarters. The main gates at the end of the long, neglected drive are rotting and askew. A tumbledown lodge with dirty, broken windows and blistered doors stands tenantless and choked with ivy and creepers, and leaves the entrance through a ramshackle wicket-gate unguarded. Along the path to the house, unkempt lawns, overrun with untended rambler-roses, neglected shrubs and flower-beds running riot and returned to nature, tell of long-dismissed gardeners. The visitor ploughs his way through masses of sodden leaves, the fruits of many autumns, to the dilapidated front entrance. The cattle and sheep of farmers, who have bought the surrounding parkland from the mortgagees, stop their gnawing and chewing the cud and gaze at the intruder, stupidly placid. All the way, Mr. Burt rapidly and skilfully values and calculates. He greets the wrecked garden, rotten woodwork, rioting flowers, mouldering leaves and the atmosphere of decay and corruption as his allies in striking a bargain. Every one is a deduction from his valuation; each a debit item against the present owner. Climbing the dirty, worn steps, he rubs his hands and tugs at the bell-pull.

The door is answered, after Mr. Burt's third united assault on knocker and bell, by a withered old crone in a soiled cap and apron, who pops her head from an upstairs window and squeals down at him. She has all the characteristics of a bird of ill-omen.

"Go away!" she yells in a shrill, trembling falsetto. "We've seen enough of your kind around here lately."

Mr. Burt, mistaken for an importunate creditor, uses every weapon in his vast armoury of persuasion to convince the servant otherwise, but fails miserably. At length, the altercation is varied by the voice of the owner himself, unseen, quavering and high-pitched, from behind the still firmly-closed door.

"What the hell do you want? Can't I be left in peace among the ruins of my house without being eternally disturbed by a pack of yelling creditors! I've nothing for you but a bucket of cold water and two savage dogs. So go your ways and be damned to you."

"I'm neither creditor nor broker's man," shouts the financier, almost plaintively pleading his cause above the noises of arguing voices and the sounds of moving furniture on the other side of the apparently barricaded

door. "I want to buy this place. Buy it from you. I'm open to discuss terms. Very liberal, very favourable terms...."

The angry squire inside seems to pass through a series of awful convulsions before he replies. Dogs bark and chains rattle.

"I'll see you in hell first!" he screams. "This isn't my place to sell, but the home of generations and generations of shades before me and heirs to come. Get out, or by God, I'll set the hounds on you."

More barking, savage snufflings and eager whining from within suggest preparations for carrying out the threat, so Mr. Solomon Burt decides to make a tactical retreat.

All the way home to London, the property man ponders his designs. He has made up his mind to buy Harwood Hall, and once determined, it needs more than a crazy old man to stop him. Already, he sees advertisements in the dailies:

"Situated half-way between London and the lovely Sussex coast. Quiet and in the heart of beautiful country, yet within a stone's throw of the main line. Frequent trains to London Bridge and Victoria. An ideal half-way-house between business and the sea. Relaxation after business at the Harwood Park Country Estate."

Yes, Harwood Park, that's it!!

Mr. Burt savours his literary creation with pleasure and sees visions from the back of his car. The house shall be altered without losing its external grace. He will buy it for a mere song and then ...

Luxury flats with every modern comfort. Tastefully laid-out olde-worlde gardens. Swimming-pools. Squash courts.... They all float before the inward eye of Mr. Burt. And a wealthy clientele of those desiring the country life with West-End conveniences. Eager and willing to pay enormous prices for them.... Mr. Burt's mouth waters. He is so good tempered with his scheme when he reaches home, that he re-engages his chauffeur and gives him the evening off for breaking down where he did.

It speaks well for the speed and thoroughness of Mr. Burt's efforts that Harwood Park Country Estates, Ltd., advertised their eight exclusive tenancies at prices ranging from £350 (top-floor) to £500 (loggia and private sun-lounge) per annum each, inclusive, six months later. Within a month, they had let them all to an assorted body of business men, anxious

to see rolling acres as they shaved every morning, jaded actresses eager to become village lady bountifuls, and sundry other families or isolated tenants wishful either to rest in peace or to pursue vice in quiet secrecy.

For Solomon Burt had not only bought-in all the mortgages at a spanking discount, but had also foreclosed and driven out old Theodore Harwood to an obscure family hotel in Kensington. He had re-decorated the place, installed electricity, modern plumbing, central heating and conditioned air. And he had divided the house into suitably proportioned flats. The gardens blossomed, the old fishpond renewed its youth as a bathing-pool, and the tennis courts replaced some of the tumbledown greenhouses which, in days long gone, had yielded strawberries in December and priceless exotic blooms all the year round.

Burt was warned well in advance, however, that he was not going to have it all his own way at Harwood. As the old squire departed, he turned to his persecutor, who happened to be on the spot with a demolishing expert, with a toothless and malevolent leer.

“You’ve not finished with the Harwoods yet,” cackled the evicted one. “You’ll find other tenants besides your upstarts from London, you destroyer ... you swindler! Just wait!”

The trouble started shortly afterwards.

First, the water-pipes burst, although the frost had long since gone. Then, an ornamental ceiling in the fine old dining-room crashed down, filling the place with plaster and dust and leaving laths grinning down on those below.

Workmen began to suffer, too. Tools disappeared. Jobs finished one day were found undone the next. Accidents galore occurred. Two contractors went bankrupt through extras incurred and workmen went on strike from sheer peevishness, created, it seemed, by the atmosphere which pervaded the whole of the building.

Old villagers toping at the bar of the local inn, shook their heads and gazed pityingly at the joiners and bricklayers on the Hall job who looked in frequently for a strengthening pint.

“The old ’uns ’ave started their ’auntin’ agen, sure enough. They never was well-disposed to strangers and changes,” asserted old Moulton, the local patriarch, amid acquiescent nods from his fellows. “A mischievous, plaguy lot to them’s they don’t like. And there’s things goin’ on at the ’all that nobody won’t ever like.”

A plumber on the sanitary arrangements aptly summed up the views of the labouring classes over a supper of jellied-eels one night.

"I seems all thumbs when I'm workin' in that bloomin' 'all," he told his wife. "Place seems 'aunted, that's wot it seems. 'Aunted. And h'extra danger demands h'extra pay. See?" And his wife vigorously agreed with him.

But Mr. Burt was undaunted by obstacles.

"Confounded nonsense," he told a contractor who was pleading for some relaxation of the harsh terms of the signed and sealed document with which Solomon had fully covered himself. "There aren't any such things as ghosts and all the troubles you're having down there are through your signing-on awkward and bolshie workmen. It's your own fault. Damned inefficiency. I've a good mind to sue you for non-fulfilment. You've a blasted nerve blaming it on ghosts. This is the twentieth century, man."

The builder departed sorrowfully to file his petition in bankruptcy and was replaced by another victim.

At length, the perseverance of Mr. Burt and the martyrdom of his contractors seemed to bear fruit. The unseen powers acknowledged defeat, ceased from their tormenting and the place was finished. One afternoon in late July, just before the general moving-in began, Mr. Burt rubbed his hands in joy over his list of tenancies. Applications for his flats had rolled in. Nay, in several cases it had been like an auction sale. Higher prices than those fixed had been offered to secure possession. There had been a perfect stampede for Mr. Burt's Harwood benefactions. So much so, that Solomon himself had been greatly impressed by his own handiwork and taken one of them himself. His register, now complete, read as follows:

- | | | |
|---------|---------------|---|
| Flat 1. | Ground Floor. | Mr. and Mrs. Carberry-Peacocke, Retired City Merchant and wife. |
| 2. | " | Mr. and Mrs. Hartwright, Americans, settled in England for a while. |
| 3. | " | Miss Elaine Freyle, West-End actress. |
| 4. | First Floor. | Arthur Williatt, Author and Playwright. |
| 5. | " | Mr. Solomon Burt. |
| 6. | " | Misses Agnes and Edith Pott, Spinsters of |

limited means.

7. Second Floor. Professor Emil Braun, Celebrated Anthropologist and refugee from Vienna.
 8. “ Ernest Brownrigg, Diamond Merchant, of Hatton Garden.
- Lodge. Samuel Stone, caretaker.

By the end of July, all the tenants had moved-in, with the exception of Mr. Brownrigg. His furniture arrived, but he himself wrote to say that he would not be able to appear in person for some time. He would be absent abroad for most of the summer, but was anxious to retain the flat, for which he enclosed a year's rent in advance.

There was a house-warming and Mr. Burt paid for champagne. On this occasion he was eventually put to bed by the rest of his tenants, for he was incapable of climbing the stairs under his own power. As he sank to sleep, he was heard to mutter, “All good pals together.”

UNINVITED GUESTS

THE first signs of renewed hostilities against Mr. Burt and his works were manifest three days after the outbreak of war and in the kitchen of the Carberry-Peacockes. Seeking relaxation from the strain of recent past events, they were listening to a broadcast of gramophone records of an impressionist ballet, when they were disturbed by similar noises magnified tenfold in the maid's quarters. On investigation they found all the crockery and china scattered, broken on the floor, the chairs and tables overturned, the refrigerator inverted in the middle of the room and the electric stove in the sink.

At first, the Carberry-Peacockes suspected that the maid had arrived home drunk and, in an alcoholic frenzy, developed almost superhuman strength. But when that young lady appeared later, bright-eyed, smiling happily and somewhat dishevelled after a tempestuous wooing by the local postman, they had to alter their theory.

"It's a poltergeist, my dear," delightedly shouted Mr. C.-P., who was a bit of a psychic researcher, and he forthwith telephoned the good news to many friends inviting them to a seance to share his phenomenal luck, whilst his wife made tea in a flower-vase.

The disturbances were not received so felicitously in other parts of the house, however.

The elder Miss Pott was deaf and slept through everything in blissful ignorance, but her younger sister fared badly. She was outraged by the shades of scantily-clad Regency bucks and their brazen paramours parading in her virgin bower in the small hours of the morning.

In their comfortable suite-with-loggia, the Hartwrights, struggling to get to sleep on the very spot where the Harwood Regency fops had gambled away the family funds, were kept awake by the ceaseless rattle of dice.

Miss Elaine Freyle, resting between shows at the expense of an admirer whom Mr. Burt had a mind to oust if he got the chance, shivered and

perspired alternately for several nights under changing currents of hot and cold air which blew upon her comely and recumbent form independently of the air-conditioning plant. Thuds, here, there and everywhere in her room wakened her when she managed to fall asleep in defiance of the draughts.

Mr. Williatt, the dramatist, was disturbed by the persistent rhythmic bumping of what sounded like the village pump being handled strenuously.

The Carberry-Peacockes' maid gave notice at once and joined the W.A.A.F., for the postman turned out to be married.

In fact, the only tenants who seemed immune from the attentions of unwanted guests were Professor Braun, occupying the cheapest suite alone, lost in anthropology and meditation, and Mr. Sol Burt, who was accustomed to falling asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow and who didn't hear a thing. His tenancy agreements contained clauses promising "peaceful possession" to the renting party and these he upheld by a most vigorous denial of any untoward noises and a loud declaration of unbelief in spooks and such poppycock.

In his heart, Mr. Burt was convinced that some rival in the estate world was trying to force a cheap sale by discrediting the property and he expressed to his clerk his intention of calling in the police if matters had not improved within a week.

On the night following his profession of scepticism, Mr. Burt himself fell a victim to the strange forces he had defied.

One minute we see him comfortably sleeping in his luxury bedroom. His mind is at rest, for although Miss Freyle, temperamental and fond of a scene, had packed up and taken herself off back to Maida Vale, and her boyfriend had promised to pay the penalty of her breach of contract, the rest of the tenants have declared their intentions of seeing this thing through and remaining where they are. They decline to be driven from their idyllic abode by powers unseen and are as one in standing by Mr. Burt. The Misses Pott, unexpectedly defiant and resolute, are confident in their virtue and strength of mind to withstand the attempts to demoralise them, and express their decision to call in the services of an exorcist. The Carberry-Peacockes in their scientific zest have almost adopted their poltergeist as one of the family, and Mr. Burt wishes their agreement had in it a loophole whereby he could increase the rent. The Hartwrights have, by stopping their ears and

making up their minds to stick it, slept, and be hanged to the dice! Williatt, with the help of a strong nightcap, has managed to defy the pump-handle.

So, we find Mr. Burt snoring and leering in his sleep at something he must be dreaming about. But not for long.

Suddenly, about 3 a.m., he is awakened by a firm hand which shakes him until his gold-filled teeth rattle. Once awake, he becomes aware of a commotion going on all around him. Heavy feet tread the corridors. The rattle of dice and loud shouts rend the night-watches. The distant sounds of quadrille music are heard coming from the minstrels' gallery in the communal lounge. The noises of splitting wood and shattering china announce that Carberry-Peacocke's poltergeist is hard at it once more.

Mr. Burt's particular trouble, however, soon occupies the whole of his attention.

By his bedside stand two rakes scornfully regarding him through quizzing-glasses with the air of men inspecting some verminous intruder in their blankets.

Burt's bones turn to jelly and his inside seems to melt within him.

"Get up, fellow," lisps the principal buck, a spokesman in a lavender coat and blue-and-white striped trousers.

Like a rabbit under the eye of a stoat, Mr. Burt obeys.

"Let me slit his throat," rumbles a husky voice from the shadows, whence emerges a most diabolical-looking villain, clad from head to foot in black and with a mask covering the upper half of his yellow face.

"Behave, Richard," says the spokesman to him. "You're not smuggling now. Only teaching a demned rascal a lesson."

Mr. Burt strains to recognise his tormentors, but perceives that they wear grotesque carnival-masks which distort their features. Trembling and spluttering threats, he is gripped by ghostly hands and pushed, blundering and fumbling, downstairs, through the open front door and out to the moonlit lawn. He calls for help, but nobody answers. He is too scared to feel the night air or the dew on his bare feet. His eyes bulge and his breath comes in wheezing gasps. He cannot see properly, for he has been hustled-off without his spectacles.

"It's a nightmare," Mr. Burt tries to tell himself. "I'll wake up soon in my bed in Park Lane."

His three shadowy captors urge him on. He cries out again, but the noises going on in the house drown all his appeals. The party now reaches the converted fishpond.

“Remove your clothes!” orders the ringleader.

“Mercy! I can’t. I’ll die of cold. It’s not right. You’ll pay for this,” whines Mr. Burt, helpless, like a fish in a net.

“Let me slit his throat,” again says the lugubrious voice of the smuggler in black.

“Quiet, Richard,” say his companions.

Mr. Burt, fearing the worst, slips out of his dressing-gown and pyjamas and stands naked beneath the moon. He is not a pleasant sight, for good living and lack of exercise have played havoc with his native flesh. He is still struggling internally as men do when they try to shake themselves awake from a terrible dream.

“Jump in ...” comes the next command, and the shapes from the shades point their fingers at the bathing-pool.

“I can’t swim,” pleads Mr. Burt, forgetting how shallow he has made the pond in cheeseparing his specifications.

He is seized and hurled headlong into the icy water, which stings him into vigorous action. Desperately he flounders to the bank. He scrambles ashore to the sound of mocking laughter and sees his torturers melt away into the bushes nearby. He cannot find his abandoned night-clothes, but he eventually stumbles over two coarse sandbags, conveniently left handy by departed workmen. He drapes himself decently in these and stealthily creeps to cover.

The main door is closed and Mr. Burt fears to rouse the house and show himself in his present undignified and immodest plight. He seeks an alternative entrance and finds, at length, that the pantry window of the Carberry-Peacockes’ flat is unfastened. Laboriously, the half-clad financier climbs through the narrow opening and drops to the floor. Before he can collect himself, the inner door of the larder is flung open and there stands Mr. Carberry-Peacocke, furious at being disturbed in the middle of his psychic researches. He hauls Mr. Burt, madly clutching his sackcloth attire, into the main kitchen. The intruder blinks and looks frenziedly around. On the kitchen table is what looks like an outside-broadcasting apparatus, as if the performance of the poltergeist is being relayed on the air. Three other

people are seated at the table and they eye him balefully, for he seems to have arrived at a crucial moment and is spoiling the show.

“Why ... what the ... what are you doing here?” Mr. Burt manages to say through his chattering teeth and then, realising his semi-naked plight, rushes for the door and tears up the long staircase to his own quarters. He intends telephoning for the police at once.

As he reaches the first landing where the stairs turn, the lights go out. There is a mighty rushing sound and unseen shapes seem to come and go around Mr. Burt. He encounters a form in the dark which envelops him in a powerful grip. He screams aloud in his terror. Something hits him on the head and as he struggles in a sea of blackness for a brief second or two, he feels himself hurled through space.

Then there is nothing more.

THE TOLERANT POLTERGEIST

CHIEF-INSPECTOR SHELLDRAKE of Scotland Yard pushed a tin of tobacco across his desk to Littlejohn.

“Help yourself and sit down,” he said.

“Thanks,” said his colleague, and as Inspector Littlejohn carefully filled his pipe, the Chief began to talk in his slow, gentle voice, with a trace of his Gloucestershire origins in the intonation.

“I want you to go down to Harwood and look into this Burt business, Littlejohn,” he said. “I suppose you’ve read all about it in the papers.”

“Oh, the chap who was hoisted from his bed, soused in the fishpond and then fell downstairs and broke his neck,” replied Littlejohn, with a quizzical smile.

“Yes, and I can see by the way you’re looking that you know as well as I do that that’s not all there is to it.”

“I’m sure of it,” replied Littlejohn. “The thing’s too absurd altogether. Still, I’d like a full story, sir. In normal times, I guess Mr. Burt would have enjoyed banner headlines, whereas the war’s forced him into back pages or snippets at the bottom of columns.”

“Briefly, it’s this, Littlejohn. The Sussex police were called-out early last Tuesday morning to Harwood Park, a new lot of flats made from the old hall. A chap called Burt had converted the place and had a flat of his own there. There you are....”

Shell Drake flung across the table a sumptuous brochure issued by Harwood Park Country Estates, Ltd., in its early days, to attract tenants.

“You’ll find a plan on the back page,” continued the Chief-Inspector. “During the conversion of the old hall into flats, they’d a lot of trouble from what might have been the pranks of a crowd of mischievous boys. But the tale got around that the place was haunted—had been for generations—and that the spirits, or whatever you care to call them, were resisting the changes in their abode. Burt’s man in charge of the letting told the Sussex

police this on the spot. I'm surprised the local police weren't sent for before, but gather that Burt didn't want it noised abroad, as he'd got the flats to let when he'd finished 'em, so kept mum."

Sprites, ghosts, poltergeists, they might have been a crowd of pickpockets or sneak-thieves for any excitement Shelldrake showed! The Chief-Inspector smoked placidly, wove smoke figures in the air with his pipe-stem as he talked. His clean, pink face registered no trace of humour or wonder.

"When the tenants got in, a regular haunting started. Noises, bumps, broken pots and furniture and such like. One of the tenants left at once. The others, loath to pull up their roots and get on the move again, decided to stick it for a bit, but some of them were getting fed-up with the business. Here's a list of the inhabitants."

Shelldrake added to the prospectus a letting-list, a copy of Mr. Burt's register.

"The Freyle woman, an actress, cleared-out right away. The Peacocke people, it seems, are ardent psychic researchers, and were just in their element. The Potts and the Hartwrights liked the place and said they'd put up with it for a little while. The old Professor wasn't disturbed in his flat in the attics. Williatt, who's a dramatist and a cold-blooded sort of blighter, seems to have stuck it out in the hope of finding some copy for his work. Brownrigg is away and hasn't yet entered into possession. There you have 'em and there they seem to have decided to remain. Even the death of Burt hasn't shaken them and if it had, they wouldn't have to go just yet, because the Sussex police want 'em handy. However, they haven't shown signs of undue haste to get out.

"Now, there are one or two funny features about this death and that's why the local police want our help. First of all, Mr. Burt was an influential man in the West-End and the case must be settled quickly. Already, the Commissioner has received a hint that our best efforts will be appreciated by certain well-known financier-politicians. Then again, look at the features of the affair. Stone, the caretaker, who lives at the lodge, wakens in the night, sees a light streaming from the front door of the hall and gets up to investigate in fear of the black-out regulations. The door is shut before he can get properly dressed, however, and from his bedroom window he sees a motley procession in fancy dress come traipsing across the lawn and throw

Burt into the bathing-pool. He's apparently terrified until the party breaks up, but goes off as soon as the so-called spooks disappear. He finds Burt dressed in sackings lying in the hall with his head battered and his neck broken. And somebody tries to say that a poltergeist's done it! I've never heard such nonsense! Then the Freyle woman plunges into print for the benefit of 'Our Special Correspondent,' with a hysterical account of blood-curdling happenings which drove her out. The local police have had to put a cordon round the hall to keep out the single and collective ghost-hunters. And all the time, believe me, the whole show's a frame-up, covering something underhand. There's neither rhyme nor reason in any other theory."

"I quite agree, Chief...."

"Either somebody had it in for Burt and put on a show to create a diversion while they made away with him, or else it's a rival in the estate market who's tried to ruin the speculation and gone a bit too far. Or again, it might have been old Harwood, who's been damned badly treated and swindled by Burt in the matter, except that the old chap's eighty or more, with one foot in the grave. Anyhow, go down and find out what's the matter and all about it and let's be done with it, quick. We want to be getting on with winning the war, not hunting a lot of spooks."

Littlejohn rose and stretched himself.

"Right," he said. "I'll get down straight away. I know the place. Been through it on the way to Brighton...."

"Take this with you to read in the train," said Shelldrake, and he passed over a copy of F. W. H. Myers' "Personality and Its Survival After Bodily Death."

"It's the only book I've got myself on the subject and it's written by an intelligent man, not a crank or one with an axe to grind. You'll find I've marked a page there on poltergeists. As a rule, when one of those is about, spooks, ghosts, goblins and the rest keep off. The Harwood Hall one, however, is more complacent. He allows all the stops to be pulled out of the organ and a complete revue-chorus of every kind of haunting, bumping, banging, and the such to pervade the place. If you want any further technical help on the subject, refer to Caffin, the psychic expert. Here's his card. Mention my name. He'll tell you anything, or lend you any of his

books. Now look after yourself, Littlejohn, and don't you be trying conclusions with the china-smasher. Good-bye and good-luck."

And Shelldrake's face eased into its first smile as he extended his hand.

Before making his way to Victoria Station for his train, Littlejohn called at the late Mr. Burt's offices in Hanover Square. There he was received by Mr. Stagg, the secretary of the Harwood Park Company, and a man who, to hear him talk, enjoyed his late master's confidences to the full.

Mr. Stagg was under forty and was small, thin, dapper and had fair curly hair, a pink feminine complexion and hazel eyes set in dissipated-looking sockets. He had an air of going in for art in his spare time. Perhaps he was a specialist in decorations and bathroom tiles. He was smoking a cherrywood pipe and presiding over the labours of a bevy of about twenty good-looking girls, all writing or typing furiously. He might have been the chamberlain of Mr. Burt's seraglio, for he sternly handled his staff as though conscientiously refusing to mingle business with pleasure.

At first, Stagg mistook Littlejohn for a client, bowed him into a sumptuous interviewing-room and pushed a box of cigars in the detective's direction. On hearing the purpose of the visit, however, Mr. Stagg changed from estateagent to taxpayer. He behaved as he thought a citizen should do towards one whose salary he helps to pay. He grew grave, less obsequious and he closed the lid of the cigar-box. Littlejohn felt that had he accepted one, Mr. Stagg would have taken it back.

After a short and flattering funeral oration on his late employer, Mr. Stagg assured Littlejohn that he would in no way suffer himself through the tragedy. Mr. Burt's ventures were all frozen into impersonal companies, limiting their founder's liabilities and securing their continuity.

"... in fact, you might say that as soon as he created anything fresh, Mr. Burt made a present of it to the public. He floated it as a company and gave the shareholders the benefit of it in future."

"In exchange for their cash, of course," Littlejohn could not help adding.

"Certainly. You can't expect something for nothing."

"And now, to begin at the beginning, Mr. Stagg, can you tell me anything about this haunting story? I hear that the mischief began whilst the alterations were in progress."

“That’s true, Inspector, and a pretty penny they cost the late boss. We often discussed it together and both of us came to the conclusion that it was some rival in the estate business who wanted to make the project a failure.”

Mr. Stagg pursed his lips, thrust his face forward and jerked his head in a gesture of finality which brooked no challenge.

“And what did you do about it, Mr. Stagg?”

Here the estate agent relaxed, stuffed his hands in his pockets, sprawled his legs and puffed at his cherrywood, his mouth working like that of a fish in an aquarium.

“We had a watchman on duty, of course,” he continued, speaking round his pipe stem. “But the blighters seemed to dodge him. We doubled the watch, but it was the same. Noises would be heard in one part of the place and while the men were investigating, the vandals would be at it somewhere else.”

“You never thought of calling in the local police, I’m told.”

Mr. Stagg removed his pipe, much to Littlejohn’s relief.

“No. You see, that would have made the thing public and we wished to avoid it at all costs. After all, we had the flats to let, you know, and if anything had got about that they were haunted or the like, it was good-bye to any tenants. Mr. Burt, of course, positively refused to give up the venture. Once he’d sunk his money in anything he was like a bulldog ... ahhhh ... hemmm.”

Mr. Stagg emitted a mournful sigh as though, at one and the same time, lamenting and honouring the dead.

“So, he just stuck it out and footed the bill, Mr. Stagg?”

“Yes. Fortunately the haunting business stopped suddenly and we were able to get on with the job properly. It was only after the flats had been let and tenanted that other disturbances began.”

“Then what happened?”

“Well, at first, Mr. Burt pooh-poohed the idea. Then, so many of the tenants were involved, that he decided to investigate. He took the tenancy of one of the flats himself at the beginning and instead of just going there week-ends, as he’d planned, he made up his mind to travel to and fro every day until he’d got to the bottom of the affair. He still thought it was a professional rival trying to get the better of him and, if anything happened whilst he was there himself, he proposed to put a pukka investigator on the

matter. But before he could do anything the tragedy happened ... ahhhh ... hemmmm.”

“Had Mr. Burt any special enemies, professional or private?”

“Not that I’d know. He’d rivals, of course. Plenty of ’em. In our game there’s keen competition, but not so keen that we set about doing one another violently to death. The thing’s beyond me!”

“Now for the tenants, Mr. Stagg. They were all on the spot at the time of the crime except Mr. Brownrigg and Miss Freyle. Can you tell me anything about them? I know you take up references before letting a flat and I’d be glad of as much information as you’ve got about each of them.”

Mr. Stagg pressed a bell-push and a languid young lady, who only needed a Spanish comb and a flower in her hair to complete her make-up for the title-role of Carmen, entered with the stealthy grace of a mannequin showing-off the latest creation.

“Get the letting-file for Harwood Hall please, Miss Hodkiss?” ordered the little fellow and the girl departed without so much as rolling an eye. There was some delay, which caused Mr. Stagg to spring petulantly to his feet, fling open the door, clap his hands and cry, “Come, come, Miss Hodkiss!” Whereat Carmen appeared once more, quite unperturbed, gracefully placed a packet of papers in the hands of her boss and made a most ornamental exit.

“Here we are, Inspector. Letters of application, two references for each tenant, and a tenancy agreement signed by every one.”

The agent passed over the lot with magnanimous gesture.

Littlejohn ran his eye over the papers. Then he took out his notebook and made a brief memorandum:

CARBERRY-PEACOCKE.	Former address, Mayfield, The Chase, Purley. Retired tea merchant. References: Former landlord, T. Parkes-Wood, Tintagel, The Chase, Purley, and Home Counties Bank, Rood Lane, E.C.3. Reported respectable and good for rent in each case.
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HARTWRIGHT.	Written from Park Side Hotel. Late of Philadelphia. In England for at least twelve
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months. References: Philadelphia Express Co., Cockspur Street, S.W.I. "Good for amount of rent." American Consulate: "American Citizens. Papers in order."

MISS FREYLE.

No references. Known to Mr. Burt.

WILLIATT.

Known to Mr. Burt. Cotts' Bank, Wardour Street, report: "Respectable and should be good for your figures."

MISSES POTT.

Late of The Cedars, Ewell. References: Snodgrass and Peate, Solicitors, Epsom, "Clients of ours and very respectable ladies. Considered worthy of tenancy." London and S. Counties Bank: "Good for this."

BRAUN.

Wrote from Master's Lodging, Benfield College, Cambridge. References: Master of Benfield: "Refugee from Nazi oppression since 1937. Late of Vienna. World-famed anthropologist. Engaging in research on Sussex Downs." Home Counties Bank, Cambridge: "Undoubted for amount of rent."

BEOWNRIGG.

Writes from Dunstanby Hotel, Park Gate, W.1. States on his way to Amsterdam and would like to secure option. Will give references on return. Meanwhile, amount for year's rent enclosed.

"Well, that's that and many thanks," said Littlejohn, pocketing his notebook and pencil and rising to depart.

"A pleasure," said Mr. Stagg rising, too, and undulating towards the door. "Let me know if I can be of any further use. We must get to the bottom of this, not only for poor Mr. Burt's sake, but for the reputation of the property. If it can be proved that it's not due to something supernatural, there's hope for us. Otherwise, I'm afraid the place is damned ... a bad egg. But, I don't believe in the supernatural, and that's a fact."

With that categorical assertion, Mr. Stagg swept his visitor out of the office and returned like a stern Mussulman to preside over his many women.

FLAT TO LET

LITTLEJOHN caught his train at Victoria and finding himself in an empty compartment, began to turn over the case in his mind. He had hitherto gathered little concerning the matter he was undertaking and found himself so barren in ideas that before they had left the London perimeter, he dozed off. When he awoke, the train was cruising easily through gently spreading fields and past quiet green hills, halting here and there at a station.

Calmly, the detective watched the scene unrolling. Difficult to think of war and crime. Trees, their leaves changing to the mellow tints of autumn. Farms snuggling in the valleys of the downs, their buildings mellowed with time and seeming part of the very countryside. A woman crossing a farmyard with a rolling, placid gait. A man repairing a fence. A cat sitting sedately, intently watching a rabbit-hole in the bank of the railway. Cattle rhythmically lopping the long grass around them. A flock of sheep bolting frantically from the train. A cock chasing the hen of his choice around a wired-in pen, whilst the rest of his dames clawed the sticky earth regardless of his philandering. A little man, knotted like an old tree and dressed like a scarecrow, walking a ploughed field with long, loping strides.

The eternal earth surrendering herself to the inevitable approach of winter, heedless of war and the destruction of Mr. Solomon Burt. A chill in the air flowing through the open window and the seasonable scents of manure, damp soil, decaying leaves and wood-smoke. One by one the impressions came and went in Littlejohn's mind as he sat quietly resigning himself to being carried along to his destination.

MEADFORD on a station sign sailed into sight as the train slowly drew-up. The elderly station-master, a bent veteran with a large protruding rump, walked back and forth with plantigrade feet, inspecting the train proudly as though it were his very own. A thin residue of evacuees descended in company with Littlejohn and were pounced on by a group of ladies waiting to receive them. A sprinkling of passengers climbed into the carriages

leaving behind them a tall, heavily-built man, dressed in well-cut tweeds, wearing a slouch hat, who might have been a prosperous farmer or a butcher. Detective-Inspector Heathcote of the Sussex Police. He hurried forward and greeted Littlejohn.

“Inspector Littlejohn? My name’s Heathcote. Sussex Police. The Yard ’phoned the time of your train. Glad to meet you.”

They made for the little station-yard, higgledy-piggledy with sacks of seed and produce, coal-dumps, new agricultural machinery and cattle-pens.

“There’s a car here,” said Heathcote, pointing to a neat turnout with a uniformed constable at the wheel, which stood in the road at the top of the approach. “But as it’s only two miles to Harwood, I thought maybe you’d like to walk. You’ll see what the surroundings are like and I can tell you a thing or two about the case as we go. What do you say?”

“I’m game enough. It’ll be good to stretch my limbs after the train journey and the air’ll blow away the cobwebs. I fell asleep on the way.”

Heathcote grinned, handed Littlejohn’s suitcase to the waiting chauffeur, and led his colleague to a small country inn, inappropriately called *The Pack Saddle*, which overlooked the railway line.

“Let’s fortify ourselves to begin with,” he chuckled.

They did not dawdle over their beer and soon were striding together along the pleasant main road to Harwood. Heathcote puffed a huge calabash and laid a smoke-screen in their wake.

“This is a damned funny business, Littlejohn,” began the local man. “Had it not been for the police-surgeon’s smartness, the whole thing might have simply passed off as a practical joke as far as the ducking was concerned and an accident as far as the falling over the balusters. But the doctor swears that without a doubt the bruise on the head was caused by a blow from something like a piece of rubber piping and not from the fall which broke Burt’s neck. This was confirmed by a second medical expert, and the coroner adjourned for more enquiries. So there we are. Of course, if you believe in mischievous spirits, poltergeists, I gather they call ’em, it’s quite possible to think that one of ’em might use a truncheon. Or, as one of the tenants, Carberry-Peacocke, who’s keen on that sort of stuff, says, these *things* have a habit of hurling missiles about violently. But I don’t believe in such tackle. Neither, I gather, do you, eh?”

“No. Have there been any more so-called manifestations?”

“Not a thing. Our men have been on the spot since the tragedy, of course. I’ve slept on the premises two nights, too. In the late Mr. Burt’s bedroom. And jolly comfortable it is. If you don’t want to be trotting to and from London, you might as well move in. You’ll not get a room at the local pub. They can only accommodate two, and Professor Braun’s assistants are there. The rest of the village is fullup with evacuees.”

“Well, I’ve come prepared to stay a bit,” said Littlejohn. “I may as well wallow in the luxury of the victim as not.”

“To be getting on with the tale, then. You know the bare outlines?”

“Yes. I’ve read the newspapers and such records as we’ve got at Scotland Yard.”

“Good. Well, there we have it then. Burt, the owner of the place, is dragged from bed in the small hours by a trio of men disguised in fancy dress and pitched into the bathing-pool in his birthday suit. That much was seen by the caretaker of the flats, a fellow called Stone, who lives at the lodge. Who the perpetrators of this unholy joke were, we’ve no idea. We can trace their footsteps to a clump of rhododendrons, where they seem to have taken off their boots and then made off through the grass in their socks. As you’ll see from my notes, all the rest of the tenants have alibis, so they’re not in it.

“Next, Mr. Burt appears, scantily clad in sacks and dripping wet, in the kitchen of the Carberry-Peacockes, who are up, listening-in to the poltergeist—or so they say—which has been abroad. These cranks were in the dark, with Mr. and Mrs. Hartwright, their neighbours, whom, it seems, they’d interested in their researches. They all gave one another alibis. Burt, it appears, couldn’t get in by the doors after his sousing and entered by the only open window, that of the Peacockes’ pantry. They switched on the light when they heard the noise, and instead of the ghost, there stood old Burt, like a drowned sailor from Davy Jones’s locker. When he saw them, he beat a hasty retreat through the kitchen door and upstairs. The next thing they heard was a fearful racket on the stairs and before they could get to the door to see what was up, down comes old Burt and breaks his neck.”

The two detectives dodged the traffic of the Brighton Road, which bisects that from Meadford to Harwood, and, on safe ground again, Heathcote took up his tale.

“The rest of the tenants, except Professor Braun, were up, too. The younger Miss Pott put on a dressing-gown and rushed out to the corridor, there to encounter Mr. Williatt, of the same floor, who’d also been wakened by the row going on. The elder Miss Pott, who’s stone deaf, slept through it all. Both her sister and Williatt swear she was asleep from start to finish. The Professor, who’s hardly the type to cause nocturnal commotions, slept on too, he says. Furthermore, if he’d done the killing, he’d have had to pass Williatt and Miss Pott on his way back, for as soon as Burt fell, the Peacockes and the Hartwrights hurried to the foot of the stairs and cut off all retreat. Of course, Williatt and Potts might be in league and have done it together. But why? he’s years older than he is and as ugly as sin. No fear of an affair going on there and old Burt breaking-in on ’em.”

“You’ve struck a handful and no mistake,” interposed Littlejohn.

“Yes. And what’s more, I can’t get a proper tale about the legend of the haunting from the folks in the village. I’ve tried everywhere. They just dry-up when it’s mentioned. There *is* something. I know that, because the locals get so shifty when I question ’em, and shut up like oysters.”

By this time, they had reached the outskirts of the little village of Harwood, now no longer the quiet place discovered by Mr. Burt. Evacuees played in the road and on the green and mothers with children wheeled perambulators or gossiped here and there. Furthermore, there overflowed from the small premises of the Harwood Arms a motley collection of curious ghost-hunters, attracted as if by a magnet to the scene of new sensations, and among them were to be seen the bright faces of a few reporters. Heathcote had to run the gauntlet as they passed the inn and only extricated himself with difficulty.

“Of course, the usual fingerprint search is useless in a place like the Hall,” went on Heathcote as they entered the drive. “The place is rotten with prints of everybody. Can’t sort out anything.”

Littlejohn couldn’t help admiring the graceful old house they were approaching. In spite of Mr. Burt’s efforts, it retained a dignity and detachment which defied them to do their worst. Heathcote took a key from his pocket and let them in by the front door. The Adam staircase, curving beautifully, had been left intact and rose from a comfortable hall decorated with sporting prints and old brass. They climbed to the first floor and again

Heathcote produced his keys and they entered a door leading to the late Mr. Burt's quarters. He had done himself well.

"Not bad, eh?" said Heathcote.

"No. The last thing in comfort."

It was a bachelor establishment, composed of an office-cum-study, a lounge-dining-room, and a bedroom. The latter was lush with green carpet, costly mahogany suite and bed, and all the devices of a sybarite. At the head of the bed a miniature switchboard controlled patent contraptions for heating each room, boiling a kettle, warming shaving-water, and causing to function a microphonic system whereby Mr. Burt could dictate letters from his bed to a stenographer in the study if he wished. Mrs. Stone came daily to cook for such as desired it, so there was no kitchen.

"Think this'll do you for quarters while you're here, Littlejohn?"

"Yes, I think so. I'll not want to do any work among all this comfort unless I take a firm hold on myself!"

"Mrs. Stone'll see to your food. I've used the study next door as a sort of office; expect you'll do the same."

Heathcote attended to Littlejohn's creature comforts in the way of showing him the bathroom and various other aids to indolence.

"Well, I'll be getting along," he said at length. "When you want a meal, just call the lodge. Here's the private 'phone." And he demonstrated yet another device. He pointed out the various keys of the instrument, "Lodge," "Garage," "Hall," "Kitchens," and pressed the button under the last heading.

"Just come up, Lister," he said.

"That's the constable in charge for the time being. He or his relief will be at your beck and call day or night."

Having turned over Littlejohn to his underling, a pleasant-faced young constable who looked like the champion caber-tosser of the force, Heathcote went his way.

"I'll be in first-thing to-morrow," he said at the door. "Must get back to my desk. Combing-out the aliens. What a game! You'll find all you want in the file I've left on the desk there. Medical reports, dispositions of tenants, my own notes and such. See you soon. So long!"

"Anything you want, sir?" asked P.C. Lister, apparently anxious to be doing something, goodness knows what. "Like to meet any of the tenants

... see any of the house ... or shall I order you a meal?"

"Let's see ... four-thirty, eh? Yes, Lister, you might ask Mrs. Stone to have something ready for me in about an hour and tell her to get this suite ready, too. I'll be occupying this flat for the time being."

"Right, sir," replied Lister and made off.

Littlejohn took his hat and descended for a stroll about the place. As did Mr. Burt in days past, the detective enjoyed the grounds and the surrounding country, admired the house again, sought-out the now famous bathing-pool and other spots noted in the reports. But his pleasure came from different sources than those of Mr. Burt's. The atmosphere took hold of one. Quiet, placid, comforting scenes. The way the Hall seemed set in the countryside, overlooking the cluster of cottages in the village, dominating and at the same time protective. The fine trees of the parkland, and in the distance, a forest on one side, the rolling pastures of the downs on the other, with fields of autumn stubble or winter-greens between.

The kitchen-garden and greenhouses were deserted, with the exception of one small, wiry man. The rest had evidently gone off for the night. The remaining workman seemed to be pottering around killing time. He was dressed in a shabby blue serge suit, wore a cloth cap, and a cigarette dangled from the corner of his thin lips. His face was sharp and wedge-shaped, with a large nose and bright eyes. His complexion and gait, however, denied that he belonged to the country. He removed his cigarette, sprayed out the smoke and touched his cap to Littlejohn.

"Evenin', guv'nor," he said with a Cockney perkiness which could not be mistaken.

"Evening. What are you doing so far from Town?"

"Gorblimey, guv'nor. I asks myself the same question every minute o' the bloomin' day. Why did I leave good old London? 'Cos of the bloomin' war, of course. Missus and two kids was evacuated dahn 'ere, so, 'avin' joined-up in the Pioneers myself and waitin' for me pipers, I thinks I'll come wiv 'em. Cor! Look at it, guv'nor. Look at it..."

With a flip of the back of his hand in the direction of the lovely rural scene Littlejohn had just been admiring, the little Cockney dismissed it all in disgust.

"Gimme the good old Elephant any day! Lights of town, smell o' petrol, friendly boots on the pavements, pint of old and mild wiv a pal, pictures or

a sing-song wiv the missus on Saturdays.... You can keep yer country, guv'nor. I makes you a present of the whole bloomin' lot of it."

"You sound fed-up ... what's your name?"

"Agg, sir. Charlie Agg, wivout the haitch. Porter in the Borough Market till I joined-up. Now, I'm just doin' oddsand-ends for the price of a pint in the garden 'ere till I gets me pipers, see? An' please Gawd they comes soon, else the Jew-boy won't be the only one who's croaked in his swimmin'-pool. Sometimes I gets so down in the mouth, I could make an 'ole in it myself. Always granting, of course, that it's deep enough, which it ain't. Women and kids wiv nothin' to do, no school, no housework, all the day and half the bloomin' night fallin' out wiv one another. Nah, when we was back in good old London, we'd park the kids wiv me mother, see, an' off for a spree on our own-io. But now ... pah. If you want a spree, the missus has the kids to mind or else she's takin' tea wiv lady lahdidah. And as for a pal ... tryin' to get drunk at the pub in this blighted 'ole's like attendin' yer own funeral. S'welp me if it ain't."

"Well, you've had the entertainment of a ghost and a murder while you've been here, Agg."

"Ghost did yer say, guv'nor? Come off it. Ghost, me foot! All a put-up job, I says. Clannish, unfriendly lot, these country coves. They didn't want the Jew-boy among 'em, see? So they put on a little show for 'im, see? Jest to frighten 'im off...."

"You're a sceptic, eh?"

"If yer mean I don't bloody-well believe in them and their 'auntings, you're right there, guv'nor. Them an' their superior ways. You should see an' 'ear 'em in the taproom at the pub. 'We got all sorts of 'orrible things in the country fer them that intrudes on us,' an' they wags their heads an' looks wise an' tries to insinuate that becos you comes from town, you're not in it. Why, back in dear old London, I could show 'em a thing or two...."

Evidently Agg had not settled down in Harwood. Littlejohn could guess why. He was homesick and his hosts couldn't understand the reason.

"... not that they ain't been good to the missus and kids and lots more like 'em. Dumped on them, they was, at a minute's notice, just like kiss yer hand. But they done 'em proud and don't let it be thought I ain't grateful, see? I am. But ghosts...."

And Mr. Agg spat copiously on the gravel path. Littlejohn let him prattle on.

“Nah, that detective bloke’s bin in the taproom tryin’ to pump the locals. ‘Any legends, past ’istory, about ghosts and ’auntings?’ he sez one night, civil-like. And they all dries-up like oysters. ‘’Orrible things ’as ’appened there in the past,’ sez an old bloke wiv whiskers a yard long and a capacity of about a pint and an ’alf a night. ‘Wot sort o’ things?’ asks the busy. ‘O, ’orrible,’ sez the old cove and the other natives looks at one another all suspicious-like. They all know what ’appened to the Jew-boy, but they’re not tellin’, see? A put-up job, I calls it....”

“What’s the name of the old fellow you mentioned, Agg?”

“Mouldon ... lives on his pension in a cottage oppersite the pub. Like the ole man of the sea, ’e is.”

“So you think it was a put-up job?”

“Yes ... an’ ’cos why? Stone at the lodge is a native ’ere, too. Why did ’e stop indoors and not lift a finger to ’elp when he see his boss being ducked? ’Cos ’e’s in it, too. An’ when the busies tries to get out of ’em what all the tales o’ ’auntin’ is about, they can only shake their ’eads and look wise, see? And for why? ’Cos until this bloomin’ howdedo, there ’asn’t been any ’auntin’, see? They made it up to cover themselves and what they done. They planned it all to be rid of the chap from London.”

Littlejohn understood at last Mr. Agg’s feelings and heat about the hauntings. Mr. Burt of London claimed the little Cockney’s loyalty and he resented his being victimised by countryfolk.

“Well, Agg, here’s the price of a pint if you’re going to the village to-night. You can tell them that there’s a chap from Scotland Yard on the job and it’s murder this time. So they’d better talk and talk the truth if they’re asked.”

Poor little Agg didn’t know whether to laugh or cry.

“Gorblimey, guv’nor. You a busy? Thanks for the price o’ the beer. I appreciates it, guv’nor. I’ll do as you say, an’ no fooling. But I didn’t think you was a busy. S’welp me, I didn’t. Thought you was a retired gentleman down from London, I did.”

“Oh, come, come, Agg....”

Agg grinned.

“Awright, guv’nor.”

“Just let ’em know that it’s murder, Agg. Rub it in. Make their hair stand on end.... See you again, I hope.”

“Not fer long ... sooner I gets back to dear old London, the ’appier I’ll be. Nice to know the missus and kids is safe from ruddy old ’itler and his nasties, but ’ome sweet ’ome fer me, even if there *is* a war on.”

Littlejohn left him still gazing disparagingly around, homesick for his native streets and weighing the whole countryside in the balance and finding it wanting.

FORTITUDE OF SIX TENANTS

MRS. STONE, a dumpy, bustling, middle-aged woman, appeared with Littlejohn's tea and established him comfortably at the dining-table of the man whose death he was investigating. She looked the type who might prove talkative on the slightest provocation. There was the look of a gossip about her, although she had a healthy, open countrywoman's countenance. The latter suffered a change, however, when the Inspector mentioned the death of Burt and the reputation of the old house. Her eyes grew shifty and suspicious and she seemed anxious to be getting off to her own quarters.

"You've been having harassing times here of late, Mrs. Stone," began the detective, facing boldly up to a substantial dish of home-cured ham and eggs.

"Yes, sir. Things have bin a bit upsettin', what with the poor gentleman dying and the war and evacuees and sich like."

She kept her eyes on the tablecloth and fussed with the condiments, passing Littlejohn salt, mustard, sauces, sugar and milk in rapid succession.

"Did you see the goings-on in the garden, like your husband, on the night of the crime?"

"No, sir. I slep' through 'em all, me not gettin' off to sleep so good, and once off, Stone not wishin' to disturb me."

"You didn't hear him go out then when he discovered the crime?"

"If crime it was, sir. There's many as says it was pure accidental. Who of the ladies and gentlemen here would want to throw a poor man to his death over the staircase? When Stone had found out the death, then he come back and woke me. Sich a hullabaloo there was goin' on, too."

"How long have you been in Harwood, Mrs. Stone?"

"I was born 'ere, sir, and stayed till I was twenty. Then I went in service to East Grinstead for five years, where I married Stone, who came from the village, too, and was gardener there. We came home then, Stone having got the lodge-keeping here and under-gardener. Five years since, Mr. Harwood

said we'd have to go, him not being able to keep us longer. So we moved into the village, my father havin' died and his cottage coming empty. Stone got a job at Meadford, gardenin'. When Mr. Harwood left and Mr. Burt tuck over, then Stone applied agen and him 'aving been here before and knowin' the place and being a general 'andyman, which was what Mr. Burt seemed to want, he got the job and we come back to the lodge, which was in shockin' condition and needed a lot of doing-up, as did the garden...."

She was in full spate. Littlejohn laid his hand on her arm.

"Tell me, Mrs. Stone, during the time you've known Harwood Hall, has it been haunted? Now, I don't mean did people say it was haunted, but did anything *happen* here?"

Mrs. Stone dried-up, took up her tray and looked ready to bolt. She glanced over her shoulder towards the door and pleated her apron with her free hand.

"Come now. Are you scared of something? Because you needn't be. Nothing's going to harm you."

The woman's lips tightened.

"Yes, I am scared. Funny things 'ave gone on here, sir. I'm sayin' nothin'."

"In what way, funny?"

"Just funny. Ghosts and things."

"How long ago?"

"Long as I remember, sir."

"But have you ever *seen* or *heard* anything yourself?"

"No, sir. I kep' away after dark...."

"You did not attend at the house, then, in the evenings?"

"No, sir. Wasn't part of our duties. Sometimes Stone came across to take his orders...."

"Did Stone ever see or hear any haunting?"

"We never talked about it. Will there be anything more, sir?"

"No thanks, Mrs. Stone. But you might ask your husband to come over and see me in about an hour's time. I want a word or two with him. And one thing more. You haven't been very frank with me about this haunting business, have you?"

"I ... I ..."

“Maybe you are only going by hearsay. If so, I expect you and everyone else concerned to say so. This is a murder case, Mrs. Stone. Make no mistake about it, Mr. Burt was murdered. And I’m here to find out who did it. If people won’t answer questions straight to me, then they’ll have to answer them under oath in court, which will be very awkward for all of us. That’s all, Mrs. Stone. And, by the way, the ham and eggs were beautiful and I compliment you on your cooking.”

Mrs. Stone made a hot and bothered exit and Littlejohn, for the life of him, couldn’t imagine what sort of meals would be served-up in the future. He hoped he hadn’t roused the good woman’s ire, for his own comfort’s sake.

Stone was dressed in his best when he turned up. He had also washed his round boyish face until it shone like the mahogany furniture. He was a tall, loose-limbed fellow, slightly bent in the shoulders from his trade, with a thick shock of iron-grey hair, cloudy blue eyes and a large mouth, which seemed to cut his head clean in two whenever he laughed. He was not in a frivolous mood when he appeared before Littlejohn, however. He and his wife had evidently had their heads together and Stone was playing for safety.

“Well, Stone. Thanks for coming over so promptly. I’ll be staying here until this case is finished and I’ll be looking to you for as much help as you can give.”

Stone touched his forelock, shifted his weight from one foot to the other, and looked down at the outmoded bowler which he held in his large hand.

“Thankee, sir, I’m sure,” he said.

“Sit down, Stone.”

Stone selected the nearest chair, an antique which looked ready to fall in pieces under his weight, placed his hat under it and gazed self-consciously at his large, bright boots.

“Smoke if you like.”

Littlejohn passed his cigarette-case and the lodge-keeper fumbled among its contents until he finally secured one. Then he meticulously searched his person for matches, until Littlejohn offered him his lighter. Stone was a pipe-smoker, but never refused a free gift. He puffed at the cigarette awkwardly, holding it between his horny thumb and forefinger and sucking furiously at it.

“You were the only person to see the fancy-dress parade which threw Mr. Burt in the pond, I hear, Stone.”

“I was, sir.”

“How did you come to be awake at three in the morning, was it?”

“I’m bothered wi’ indigestion sometimes in the night. It allus takes me about two or three. I gets up then and sucks a soder-mint. That night it was the same, only I heard somebody stirrin’ in the grounds. I got up to the winder. I see the three ghosts in their funny dress, pushin’ Mr. Burt into the pond. Then they left ’im and vanished into the bushes and Mr. Burt went off to the Hall.”

“Why didn’t you go to help him right away, Stone?”

“I was dumbfounded, like. Couldn’t believe my eyes. I couldn’t go out in my vest and pants, sir; ’ad to get some clothes on and that quiet like, becos the missus was asleep and she not gettin’ off so easy once woke.”

“You used the word ‘ghosts.’ You know, of course, that the ghosts left footprints.”

“That’s as may be, sir. The ’all is haunted. Anybody round ’ere ’ll tell you that.”

“Yes. But has anybody *seen* anything. For example, has anyone ever seen the motley crew you saw the other night, Stone?”

“I never seen ’em afore. But then, I kep’ out o’ the way after dark, unless compelled to go there. Legend has it that some o’ the evil-livin’ Harwoods still ’aunt the place.”

“It all seems a cock-and-bull story to me, Stone. But leave the practical-joking element aside for a bit. What about this mischievous china-smasher, that some would like to saddle with killing Mr. Burt? Ever heard of him before?”

“Not here, sir. There are sich things, though. I know men who seen what they done, sir. There’s an old rectory out East Grinstead way ... all the big noises in spiritual research been down there investigatin’, like. Throwin’ pots and furniture about, it was. Nobody’d live there in the end...”

“Yes, yes. But what about the one here?”

“I knows nothin’ about him, never comin’ in here after dark, except at times like this. Mr. Harwood, the old gentleman what left, might know. But most-like the place was peaceable when he was here. Those ghosties know their own, sir. They won’t do no harm to their own flesh and blood.”

Here Stone extracted a pin from the bottom of his waistcoat and used it to prolong his noisy enjoyment of his smoke. Littlejohn gave him another cigarette to put him out of his misery.

“Well, Stone. Let me tell you quite candidly, I don’t believe this place is haunted at all. Furthermore, I don’t know whether the fancy-dress affair in which Burt was ducked in the lake and the behaviour of the mischievous sprite, shall we call him—or poltergeist—are the efforts of the small parties, but I’m going to find out. There’s a certain amount of reluctance to give information on the part of yourself and certain other villagers, I gather, about these tales of haunting....”

Stone’s cigarette fell from his limp fingers, his face grew clammy with sweat and he looked anywhere but at Littlejohn. He picked up his hat and rose trembling.

“.... But I warn anyone who witholds information, either through fear or in efforts to shield some other party, I intend to get to the bottom of this business by hook or by crook and those who won’t co-operate will find themselves on the wrong side of the law. This is murder, not an old wife’s tale.”

“I don’t know nothin’, I swear it, sir.”

“Well, put on your thinking-cap, Stone, and try to be a little more informative next time we talk about it. Search your memory thoroughly. I want facts, not tales. Sit down again. I’ve something more.”

Stone reluctantly sought the same chair and went through the ritual of depositing his hat under it again.

“I’ll be seeing the tenants to-morrow myself. Meanwhile, can you tell me why they’ve stuck staunchly to this place after all that’s gone on? Quite apart from the murder, which has, more or less, detained them pending enquiries, why did they stick it out after the so-called poltergeist and others had so frequently disturbed their sleep and peace?”

“How would I be knowin’, sir? Except that Professor Braun said it was all rubbish and he wasn’t bein’ druv out by childish tales, him bein’ so near the place of his researchings, like.”

“Yes, and what about the others? The two maiden ladies. Pott, are they called?”

“Well, Miss Agnes is as deaf as a post, sir, and never heard a thing. Miss Edith is one of them masterful sort, masculine, she is, and says she won’t be

scared-off when she's just got comfortable. Talked about gettin' a priest in and layin' the ghosties. Miss Agnes only knows what Miss Edith tells her. Writes it down on a pad, she does. She even thought Mr. Burt's was an accident and I don't suppose anybody's told her different. Her bein' an 'armless sort of old girl and one you wouldn't like to upset."

"And the Carberry-Peacockes? They're interested in psychic research?"

"Yes, sir. Just wallers in it. Almost too excited to eat and sleep they was, when the mischievous feller got goin'. Talked of havin' a meetin' of experts here, they did, and broadcasting it on the wireless. But Mr. Burt soon put a stop to that. Forbid 'em to do it, as contrary to rules and regulations of the flats. There's one or two o' them researchers in the village now, sir. Just beggin' to get in and try their 'ands at it, sir."

"And Mr. Williatt?"

"He's one o' them writers, sir. I did hear 'im say that he couldn't 'ave had a better experience if he'd paid a fortune for it. Made capital out of it, he said."

"Mr. Burt certainly seemed to have got together a faithful lot of tenants. They've hung on here with great fortitude, Stone. What about the other two, Hartwright, is it?"

"Oh, them. Americans they are and before the thing started, they'd fallen for Mr. Carberry-Peacocke and his talk. When the 'auntin' began proper, they was a bit scared at first and talked of takin' theirselves off. But after Mr. Peacocke 'ad his say, they fell in with the rest."

"H'm. Well, if it's as I think, I guess none of them will be disturbed further. With the police in the house, the ghosts will probably be well and truly laid."

As if to give the lie to Littlejohn's confident assertion, there was an appalling bump from the flat next door. This was followed by sounds of breaking china, overturning furniture and screams for help. Noises suggesting the passage of a whirlwind followed on the stairs and in the hall. Brass ornaments and pictures could be heard flying about. Then, the lights went out and the front door was heard to slam with reverberations which shook the whole of the house.

ANOTHER TENANT IN FLAT FIVE

LITTLEJOHN was on his feet in a second. Among his belongings, which he had strewn on the bed, was a large torch. He held his hands in front of him and made a dash for the bedroom door, flung it open, groped on the eiderdown and found what he wanted. With a snap, a bright beam pierced the gloom, throwing long shadows all around.

Stone was standing where he had been when the crash was heard.

Littlejohn directed the light to the outer door.

“Get down and see what’s the matter with the lights,” he said, and followed the lodge-keeper into the corridor.

From the stair-head another light approached them and, in spite of the thick carpet, heavy boots could be heard ascending.

“Here. What’s goin’ on? Who put them lights out?” growled an angry official voice, that of the police constable on watch. He had been disturbed in the midst of his beans-on-toast.

There commenced an altercation between Stone and the bobby, which Littlejohn soon cut short.

“That you, Lister?”

“Er ... yessir, yessir ...”

“Let Stone pass to attend to the lights. Stay where you are, meanwhile.”

“Yessir.”

The deep breathing of Lister and the scuttering and stumbling of Stone could be heard in the dark.

The lights went on again.

“Main switch bin thrown,” came from Stone somewhere down below.

Littlejohn turned the knob of the next-door flat and entered. The younger Miss Pott was just switching-off a torch. She was pale and obviously very shaken. A woman of about forty, medium built, with a good figure and a mop of black hair. Broad forehead from which her hair swept tempestuously back. Her dark eyes were ablaze with annoyance as though

she expected the newcomer was the cause of the commotion which had just occurred. Littlejohn did not agree with Heathcote that she was ugly. Not beautiful, that was true, but striking. Very striking.

The elder sister was sitting in a chair at a table laid with tea for two. She looked as though the disturbance had simply rooted her to her seat. She gripped the table convulsively and looked helplessly around her, her eyes finally seeking her sister's face in mute query.

Agnes Pott was apparently much older than her sister. Her hair was quite white. In contrast to her sister's pale and striking looks, her own cheeks were pink and shrivelled and her features square, with the skin sagging in resigned folds. She levered herself to her feet. A small woman, with small hands and feet and the top of her head barely reaching her sister's chin.

"What on earth's happening here?" asked Littlejohn.

"I might ask the same question," replied Edith Pott. "Who are you?"

"Inspector Littlejohn, now in charge of the case. Now, Miss Pott, what's the matter?"

"Another visitation, I presume."

Edith Pott sneered and made a gesture embracing the flat of her hand and arm.

Littlejohn looked around. Two chairs overturned and a standard-lamp on its side. That was all. The furniture was of new, limed oak with green upholstery.

"In there ..." said the younger Miss Pott impatiently and almost pushed the Inspector to the door of the kitchenette. Littlejohn flung it open. It looked like a china-shop ravaged by a bull.

The kitchen cabinet had been overturned and its contents were strewn on the floor. Flour and eggs predominated among the mess. The refrigerator had been upended and flung across the room. Littlejohn looked at the flex, the plug, and at the socket in the wall. He almost laughed outright.

"All right, I'll help you to straighten these again," he said, and with a few deft movements put the cabinet upright and slid the refrigerator back to its place by the power-point. No use looking for fingerprints among the welter of flour, eggs and vegetables!

He wiped his feet on the mat and returned to the living-room. Edith Pott followed, closing the door.

Agnes Pott hurried to meet them, her head on one side, her eyes questioning. Her sister took up a writing-pad from the top of a wireless-cabinet.

“Don’t worry. It’s all right,” she wrote.

Her sister accepted it with patient resignation, almost like a dog being told to be quiet.

“My sister is stone-deaf,” explained the younger woman.

“Now, Miss Pott, suppose you tell me what happened.”

“There’s not much to tell. The telephone bell rang. I’d just picked up the receiver when there was a terrible crash in the kitchen. Then another. Stupid of me, but I screamed. It was so startling. My sister must have felt the vibrations of the floor, for she half rose, too. Before I could do anything, the lights went out. Something seemed to pass between the two doors and go into the corridor, overturning anything in its way.”

“You made tea in the kitchen?”

“Yes. There was nobody there then.”

“You didn’t leave the flat afterwards?”

“No. We sat down right away.”

“Impossible to get in the kitchen from outside, I take it. There’s only a transom window that opens, I saw. Too small for anyone to creep through.”

“Yes.”

“Very well. I’ll go over the place in daylight to-morrow. Meanwhile, I’ll leave you to finish tea and tidy-up. If you see or find anything, just knock on the wall.”

Littlejohn turned to open the door.

At his feet lay a piece of folded paper. He picked it up and opened it.

“It’s for you,” he said and handed it to the younger Miss Pott.

“Oh ... the swine ...” she gasped and gave it back to him:

Kindly oblige by making less noise which disturbs my work.

E. BRAUN (Dr.)

Littlejohn chuckled. “A cantankerous sort, eh?”

“He’s always sending notes. First the wireless, then the gramophone. Now this. These refugees haven’t half a nerve. Think they own the place. He ought to be behind bars.”

“Dr. Braun’s place is above this, then?”

“Yes. He has the whole floor to himself until the missing tenant turns up. He’s probably sent that down by one of his assistants. There are two of them. They sleep in the village at the inn, unless they’re working late, when they seem to sleep on the floor or something.”

Miss Agnes Pott moved hither and thither, looking helplessly at the conversing pair, jockeying for position as though, by some miracle, she might overhear what they were saying. She opened the kitchen door finally and uttering a little scream rushed to her sister.

“What is it ... Edith ... what is it?” she said in a soft voice, almost a whisper, for she could not judge how to modulate her utterances.

There was an argument going on outside and the Inspector left the two ladies and went to investigate.

“Nobody to pass, I tell yer,” Lister was saying.

Surrounding the policeman were four people; two men and two women.

One of them detached himself from the crowd and approached Littlejohn.

“Inspector Littlejohn? I’m Carberry-Peacocke. What’s going on? Has the poltergeist been at it again? If so, I’d like to know about it. In my line, you know.”

A small, fair man, with nondescript features. He was well-built and dapper, with weak, watery eyes, a little snub nose, receding chin, sandy, straggly moustache, and pincenez. His thinning, fair hair was brushed straight back from a heavy and shiny forehead. He had lots of cheek and self-assurance.

“There’s nothing there for you, sir,” said Littlejohn. “The show’s over and they’re just clearing up the wreckage.”

“But ...”

“Don’t disturb them,” said Littlejohn firmly and Carberry-Peacocke’s face assumed a sulky look as he went to join the group again.

The other man was tall, heavily-built and about fifty-five. Well groomed; spotless linen; heavy, pink features and a bald head. He was so clean that he looked to have come fresh from the bathtub. He wore rimless spectacles with octagonal lenses.

One of the women, Mrs. Carberry-Peacocke, was small and podgy, with nervous hands, flat, round, pasty features and a stubborn, stupid look reflecting her reaction to Littlejohn’s determination not to permit

investigation of the damage. The other was taller, trim, and beautifully dressed. She wore silver-rimmed spectacles with a contorted patent nose-piece and had beautifully-set white hair. Her complexion looked like pink enamel in the artificial light.

"What's goin' on here?" said the big man, obviously Mr. Hartwright.

"Just another disturbance in the Misses Pott's flat. They're tidying-up."

"What's the idea of not letting us go enquire if they need help?"

"Better not bother them. They've been upset and don't want a lot of visitors at present."

"You being officious, officer?"

Mr. Hartwright looked most unpleasant.

"Most unneighbourly, they'll think us," grumbled Mrs. Carberry-Peacocke.

"Perhaps the officer's right," said Mrs. Hartwright in a soft, nasal voice. "Maybe we'd better leave it till tomorrow."

They still hung about.

"Where were you all when this happened?" asked Littlejohn.

Carberry-Peacocke's pale eyes glowed in enthusiasm to create an alibi.

"We were all taking a cup of tea together and listening to the news, Inspector."

He looked at the rest of his friends for approval.

"Sure ... listenin' to the news," said Hartwright, and the two women murmured assent.

"Did you hear the commotion?"

"Sure; who wouldn't? Sounded like a lot of ash-cans being thrown down the stairs and then the lights went out and the door slammed," grunted Hartwright.

"You all came out to investigate?"

"I got out my torch and we went straight into the hall," twittered Carberry-Peacocke.

"See anything, sir?"

"Nothing, Inspector. Missed it again!"

"You didn't see anyone go *up* the stairs, did you?"

"*No sir*, we did not," answered Hartwright, his grey eyes bulging.

Heavy feet were heard stumping down from the landing above. Everyone turned to greet the new arrival.

“Evenin’, Professor,” said Carberry-Peacocke with jaunty familiarity.

The newcomer made no reply, but singled out Littlejohn.

“What is the meaning of all this uproar?” he asked in domineering tones.

“One cannot hear one’s self speak, not to mention think or work.”

Dr. Braun spoke almost perfect English with a Viennese accent. He reminded Littlejohn of Emil Jannings at his best. Medium built, dark, heavy, standing with his solid legs planted firmly, as though sprouting from the green carpet. He had a short, thick, dark-brown beard which almost covered the whole of his face, and a pair of half-spectacles, over the top of which he glared, were stuck on his spreading, bulbous nose.

“There’s just been a disturbance in the Misses Pott’s flat, sir. A visitation—a repeat performance by the destructive poltergeist, or whatever you care to call it.”

Carberry-Peacocke sputtered a wordless protest at this manifestation of doubt.

“Poltergeist ... bah!! Old wife’s tale,” shouted Braun. “Merely an excuse for stupid horse-play.”

Braun looked at the assembled body, with the constable standing speechless, thinking of his beans-on-toast congealing, in the midst of them.

“Who are you, may I ask?” he suddenly asked, thrusting his hairy fist close to Littlejohn’s chin and jabbing at him with a thick forefinger.

“I’m a police officer investigating the death of Mr. Burt.”

“A drunken accident. A bad end to a silly man.... But I’m not here to discuss matters with you. I have my work to be done. Much work. I came here for peace and quiet. *Donnerwetter!* what do I get? Noise, noise and ever more noise ...!”

His voice rose to a bellow and he tore at his beard and hair.

.... “Hold the rest of your noisy conversing behind closed doors, I say. *Schweige! Schweige!! Schweige!!!*” And with this he turned on his heel without more ado and stamped back to his lair.

“Well!!” squeaked Carberry-Peacocke. “The cheek of the fellow! A damned Hun and a refugee! Thinks he owns the damned earth....”

P.C. Lister caught Littlejohn’s eye. He coughed officially.

“Well, ladies and gents, nothin’ more to be done ’ere. Kindly get back to your quarters, if you please.” He shepherded them away, with Carberry-Peacocke reluctantly glancing at the door of the Potts’ flat as though

undecided whether or not to make a breakaway and hunt the poltergeist again.

“By the way, where’s the other tenant, Mr. Williatt?” he called to Carberry-Peacocke, who was in the rear of the descending procession.

“Gone out,” came the answer. “Went down to London this afternoon and won’t be back until the last train.”

“Thank you, sir.”

The quartette disappeared into the Carberry-Peacockes’ retreat.

“Lister!” called Littlejohn.

The constable hurried heavily upstairs to him.

“Sir?”

“Where were you when the lights went out?”

“Havin’ my tea, sir, in the kitchen.”

The bobby’s face assumed a melancholy look as he thought of what it would now be like.

Littlejohn grinned.

“Spoiled it for you, eh?”

“Yessir.”

“You came straight into the hall?”

“I did, sir, puttin’ on my lamp as I did so.”

“Anything or anybody pass you?”

“No, sir. Couldn’t a’done. I found the tenants of the downstairs rooms all comin’ from one door as I got in the ’all.”

“So nobody came up or down.”

“Seems so. Except Stone; ’e came down, as you said, sir.”

“Where is Stone?”

“Like as not, in the kitchen with my tea,” said the constable, giving a heavy hint.

“All right. Be off with you then, Lister, and I hope your food’s not altogether ruined.”

“Like as not it is, sir. Wish we could lay ’ands on who done this,” he said malevolently.

“If Stone isn’t in the kitchen, come back and let me know, or buzz through on the house-telephone. If he’s there, don’t bother. Send him home.”

Littlejohn returned thoughtfully to his quarters. If this sort of thing had to be faced, he'd be worn to a shadow through chasing about. Better have some help. He picked up the telephone, which was in direct contact with the exchange, instead of running through a central switchboard. Scotland Yard came on at length. He asked them to send along Detective-Sergeant Cromwell as soon as possible. Cromwell had just come in, they said, and would speak to his chief himself. The two men arranged for Cromwell to come down that night.

The Inspector next 'phoned to the lodge concerning accommodation for his assistant.

Yes. Mrs. Stone could fix him up in the attic. Littlejohn shuddered. Cheek-by-jowl with Braun and his acolytes.

"Haven't you another bed you could put up in the lounge in this flat, Mrs. Stone?" he asked.

"I dessay I 'ave. There's one o' them camper's beds 'ere as was brought for evacuees, them not 'aving turned up on account of 'avin' the measles, which is a blessing, because should they 'ave broke out when 'ere ..."

"All right. Send Stone over with it, will you, Mrs. Stone? Then come yourself and fix-up the bedding and such."

"Yes, sir. Though it's dark and there's been goings-on agen to-night, I 'ear. Stone and me'll come together for company, me not likin' to be alone after dark in the grounds on account of what 'as and what might 'ave 'appened...."

Very gently Littlejohn replaced the receiver.

Cromwell arrived by the last train. He wore his bowler hat and a dark suit and looked ready for a funeral. His lugubrious face lit up as much as it ever did, when he met his chief. Littlejohn felt happier for having his company in what seemed a hostile house. Williatt returned on the train which brought Cromwell, and the junior detective said he had noticed him at Victoria. He was wearing a hat which Cromwell thought was ridiculous.

They spent an hour discussing the case. The Inspector had, whilst waiting for Cromwell, read through Heathcote's file and made notes on many points, but he was too tired to concentrate on them and deferred the matter until morning.

Littlejohn turned in and sank luxuriously into Mr. Burt's sumptuous bed. Cromwell closely inspected his own couch and laboriously made several

adjustments to suit his taste. His chief could hear him pottering about, tinkering here, fidgeting there, gargling, doing his deep-breathing exercises, cleaning his teeth vigorously and for an unconscionable time. The sergeant was still ferreting around in his pyjamas when his chief fell asleep.

BED, BATH AND BREAKFAST

It was broad daylight when Littlejohn awoke the following morning. This he knew for, although the blackout curtains were drawn over the windows, there was a bright halo round the edges as though the light of day were refusing to be altogether shut out.

He turned luxuriously over in his bed, which responded noiselessly and voluptuously to his every movement as though distended by air instead of springs. The Inspector was wide awake, but he felt no inclination to get away from the enfolding embrace of the deceased financier's couch. He lay stretched on his back with his hands under his head and listened to the birds twittering outside.

He wondered what Letty, his wife, would say when he told her that he had spent the night and proposed to spend many others in the bed of the victim whose murder he was investigating!

There was not a sound inside the house, which might be accounted for by the rich carpeting of the corridors. What were the occupants doing? Which of them knew far more than he or she admitted? Which one was lying?

Littlejohn was not particularly sensitive to atmosphere, but he didn't like that of Harwood Hall at all. It was as if evil hung about its rooms and passages. Whether or not that was due to imagination and arising out of recent events and their effects on his mind, Littlejohn could not tell. He began to search more deeply in his consciousness for reasons....

Beyond the door of the adjacent room occurred a series of strange bumping noises, rhythmic and thorough-going, as though some very sedate and orderly poltergeist were again at work to the beat of a metronome.

Bump, bump, one, two, three. Bump, bump, one, two, three.

"Cromwell!!" called Littlejohn.

There were scuffling sounds behind the door, a pause, and then the sergeant appeared in the doorway in a frame of light. He had covered his

semi-nakedness in his raincoat, beneath which were exposed his sturdy bare legs relieved by suspenders and socks.

All that was required to complete the picture was his bowler hat!

“Yes,” said Cromwell in somewhat insubordinate tones, his silhouette expressing goodwill wrestling with annoyance at the disturbance of his daily performance.

“Whatever are you doing? Sounds like a faint echo of last night’s visitor.”

“Only physical jerks, sir. Got to keep fit, haven’t we? Change from the beat to the office runs you up to fat if you don’t watch out.”

“Have you finished with the bathroom?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, run me a bath, there’s a good chap. And then sit down and be quiet. I want to talk to you whilst I soak. Bath’s a good place for inspiration. Relaxes the nerves and sharpens the brain.”

“I never find it so, sir. I don’t believe in hot baths. They sap the vitality and wash away the natural insulation of the skin, letting out the energy. And I always keep my mind on what I’m doing when I take a cold one. That’s the way to get the best out of it, I always think. Body and mind working together...”

“Well, well,” chuckled his chief. “Have you quite finished? Because when you have, it’ll still be a hot one.”

“Very good, sir.”

Littlejohn jumped suddenly from the bed before it sapped more of his resistance, and slipped on his dressing-gown whilst Cromwell took his raincoat into the bathroom and fiddled with the plugs and taps. It was as well that the sergeant was well fortified against rain, for he accidentally turned on the shower-bath....

“Just ring over the house-’phone and order our breakfast, will you?” said Littlejohn after his assistant had put himself in ship-shape again. The Inspector immersed himself in his bathwater.

Cromwell could be heard clicking the buttons and talking.

“All right then. That’ll do. It’ll *have* to do if there’s nothing else, Mrs. Stone.”

““No bacon, no h’eggs,’ she says,” he added, addressing the open door of the bathroom. “So it’s sausage and warmed-up brussels-sprouts!”

“Good God! She’s having her revenge for last night. Well, listen then, that’s a good lad.”

Littlejohn lay prone and relaxed in the water of Mr. Burt’s blue-tiled bath.

“We’ve a lot to do to-day. First inspect the whole of the premises. There *are* such things as poltergeists, you know, although, as far as I can gather, their qualities are unknown. That is, according to the books, many of ’em written by men of repute, and scientists at that. I’ve never come across one before this, but there’s plenty of well-founded evidence. John Wesley’s old home, for example....”

“Sounds like spiritualism to me, sir. I knew a chap once who attended a spiritualist chapel. He never ...”

“Let’s keep to the point, Cromwell. Tell me about your friend over breakfast....”

“Only trying to be helpful,” came an aggrieved answer from the bedroom.

“I know, old chap. I’m not ungrateful, but let me get on.”

“Now, as a rule, when there’s a poltergeist about, there’s nothing else in the way of spooks. Peculiarity number one. Here, there’s a whole bag of tricks going on at the same time, according to what Heathcote says in his notes. Poltergeists are the easiest to fake. Anybody can chuck stuff around without elaborate apparatus. Other sorts of tricks call for more risks and mechanical aids.”

“You think the business here is phony, sir?”

“As phony as they make ’em. The ducking of old Burt was a practical joke of a particularly vindictive kind. And lots of people in the village, including the Stones, know more than they’ll tell about it. We’ve got to make somebody talk and get to the bottom of that, to begin with. I’ve prepared the way for it by telling Mrs. Stone that somebody’s going to find himself in queer street on a murder charge unless he speaks the truth. If I know Mrs. Stone, she’ll have broadcast her terror all over the place already and have scared a few of the oysters into something more talkative.

“Then again. This poltergeist is a rough fellow when it comes to smashing crockery and throwing bodies over balusters. But he’s most thoughtful about the electrical system. In fact, he seems scared of live wires. Instead of tearing-out the lot in a frenzy, he turns off the lights at the

main-switch and carefully removes the plugs of the appliances from their sockets before hurling them into the sink or wherever else they go.”

“You’re on to something, sir?”

“In the Potts’ flat last night, had the spook just got hold of the frig and the electric hot-plate and slung them across the scullery to where I found them when I arrived, he’d have been sure to rip out the flex from the plug or else tear the plug and socket from their moorings. Couldn’t have avoided it. As it was, each plug was carefully taken out first.”

“Well, I’m damned! So it was a put-up, indoor job. The Miss Pottses, think you?”

“That’s what we’ve got to find out. I’m going the rounds of the tenants and property after breakfast. Meanwhile, I’m afraid I’ll have to trouble you to go back to London....”

A groan from behind the door.

“You’ll be here again to-night. I want you to call at the British Museum.”

“Ah....”

Cromwell liked the British Museum. He turned up every record he could find about his hero, his great namesake, Oliver, and rooted out his history, travels and peculiarities in meticulous detail.

“But don’t get stuck in the B.M. all the day. There’s plenty to do. Hunt up all the *Who’s Whos*, current biographies and such, and get to know all you can about past and present Harwoods and about this Hall. Try to discover if there’s any record of ghosts here. Then, find out as much as you can about Braun and the other tenants. Get Records on it at the Yard and tell ’em to contact the Home Office about Braun’s permit. Ask for details of the Hartwrights, as well. Get the Yard on with the American Embassy people and tell them to cable out to the F.B.I. on the other side for as much stuff as they’ve got on Hartwright and his wife in the U.S.A. Got that?”

“Yes,” gasped Cromwell.

“I’ll give you the list of tenants and their references supplied by Burt’s letting-office. Have those checked-up by headquarters, too. Say they might go as far as trying the local police for histories, if needs be.”

“That all?”

“Want some more?”

“No. That’ll do for one day, sir.”

“Righto. Let the Yard have those on your way to the Museum and call for any news on your way back. And now for the sausage and sprouts!”

“I think I can hear them coming, sir.”

“And by the way, Cromwell. Whilst you’re at the Yard, bring my revolver with you, and yours, too.”

“What! You expecting some shooting?”

“I wouldn’t be a bit surprised. Better be on the safe side. Here’s Mrs. Stone.”

The caretaker’s wife could be heard laying the table in the dining-room and both men hurried to their meal.

Cromwell later made a dogged and purposeful departure and Littlejohn began his day’s work.

After carefully searching Heathcote’s records the night before, he had whittled-down the mass of facts to a skeleton, showing the following framework:

(a) Coroner found open verdict. Medical evidence showed that Burt died of a broken neck due to fall over stairs. Evidently fell face downwards over balusters. How did he manage to do this; rail was four feet high? Also bruise at base of brain probably due to rubber tubing or sandbag. Influential friends of Burt say most unlikely he would commit suicide and insist on fuller investigation.

(b) Other tenants could throw little light on precise manner of Burt’s end.

CARBERRY-PEACOCKES heard a commotion begin before Burt appeared through their pantry window. Noises on stairs and banging of front door. They had hoped to arrange a broadcast of the poltergeist’s activities and had rigged-up a microphone which they produced to Heathcote. They were busy getting this contraption into operation, with the assistance of the HARTWEIGHTS, who had also been roused and joined them, when Burt appeared. He was scantily clad in sacking and, seeing the ladies, bolted through the door into the hall. The lights went out almost immediately after that. There was a violent banging and rushing on the stairs. The next thing was Burt’s body hurling into the hall.

All four of them testify that nothing passed them coming downstairs after Burt fell. They were in a group at the foot of the stairs when it happened, as Hartwright went into the hall as soon as the lights went out and the rest followed. H. shone his small pocket torch on the fuse-box. Just then, Burt fell. They discovered that the main switch had been thrown. Turned on lights again and sent for doctor and police at once.

MISSES POTT. Miss Agnes (stone deaf) slept through it all. Miss Edith heard noises and turned out to investigate, meeting WILLIATT, who was doing the same. Both saw Burt rush from C.-P.'s quarters. Then lights went out and they heard him fall. They then joined the group below.

BRAUN heard nothing. Stated he was asleep. His assistants were down at the Harwood Arms at the village.

STONE and MRS. STONE. Stone saw the incidents in the park and Burt thrown in pond. Dressed and hurried out after some delay. Arrived at hall just as lights were put on again and found Burt dead. Mrs. Stone slept through it all.

(c) Alibis:

Carberry-Peacockes and Hartwrights together.

Edith Pott and Williatt together.

Agnes Pott, Braun and Mrs. Stone asleep.

Stone crossing park. No alibi.

(d) If Hartwrights and Peacockes at bottom of stairs and Edith Pott and Williatt in first-floor corridor, the interim section of stairs was sealed whilst Burt was climbing, except that Pott and Williatt were beyond doors of Burt's flat. All swear that nobody passed them. So, whoever assaulted Burt must have come either from his flat or been waiting on the stairs. The windows of Burt's flat were fastened.

(e) Heathcote does not like the atmosphere of Harwood Hall. "Something funny," "uncanny" about it. He's almost fallen for the haunting idea himself.

(f) Previous “manifestations” said to have been reported to Burt and the company:

- Flat 1. Destructive poltergeist.
2. Noises. Rattling as of dice.
3. Changes in temperature. This flat is now empty; vacated by Miss Elaine Freyle, who refused to put up with it for another night.
4. Noises. Pumping sounds.
5. Burt’s flat. Nothing.
6. Figures in deshabille.
7. Nothing whatever. Dr. Braun, the tenant, describes whole business as nonsense.
8. Empty, but furnished. Brownrigg, tenant, said to be abroad. Presumably, now that war has broken out, we may not see him for some time.

Tenants of each flat described experiences to Heathcote.

(g) Why did they all stay, instead of, like Miss Freyle, bolting?

All, except the Misses Pott, were not unduly disturbed; certainly not scared out of their wits. Determined to stick it out for a time.

Misses Pott talked of calling in exorcist. Ladies of very limited means who could not afford another removal at present. Decided to put up with it and, as there were no more immediate manifestations after the first, remained where they were.

Note: Mr. Burt seems to have picked an unusually strong-minded lot of tenants!

After reading through his notes again, Littlejohn stretched his long limbs and rose to begin his day’s work. Standing by the window overlooking the front park, he could see Professor Braun also setting about his business. A small motor-van, laden with three packing-cases, presumably for containing his anthropological “finds,” were bearing him and his two assistants away, with one of the latter driving. The two Misses Pott were also off for the day and Miss Edith was cranking-up an ancient bull-nosed Morris with a shiny

brass radiator. Miss Agnes was patiently waiting for the thing to start. The day was bright and sunny, the hood of their two-seater was down and they looked ready for a shopping expedition, perhaps to Brighton. Littlejohn had no authority to enter the premises of any of the tenants during their absence, although presumably Stone would have a key for the flats.

The lodge-keeper was sweeping the first leaves of autumn from the flower-beds of the front lawn. Littlejohn decided to take him with him as guide to the premises and hurried downstairs to collar him before he, too, made himself scarce as the rest had done.

THE MOUSTACHE IN THE POTTING-SHED

LITTLEJOHN couldn't get to the bottom of the shifty manner of the man Stone.

When the detective interviewed or approached him indoors, the lodge-keeper behaved like a schoolboy marking time and ready to march off at the word. Encountered out-of-doors, the fellow seemed to be trying to conceal himself behind bushes and trees in the hope of being overlooked. If spoken to, he glanced furtively around him seeking-out a line of retreat, like a dog which is anxious to visit the nearest lamp-post, yet obeys his master's command to remain where he is and perform his parlour-tricks.

"Whatever's the matter with you, Stone?" asked Littlejohn impatiently, for, on being discovered in the garden, the man had leapt up like someone shot.

"Nothin', sir," replied Stone, but his looks belied his words.

"Well, whatever it is, you'd better settle down and prepare for a morning's session, because you're going to show me over the place. Furthermore if you're hiding anything from me—and I judge that you are from your behaviour—you'd better tell me before I find out."

"I'm not hidin' nothin'," protested the handyman, "I swear it...."

"Don't perjure yourself.... Let's be getting along."

They made for the house by the front way.

"How many of a staff are there here, Stone?"

"The wife and myself what you might call resident, sir. Then three women comes from the village to clean up the flats. Arrangements is that tenants pays for cleanin' their own rooms. That's wot the women from the village is for. Mrs. Stone looks after the main 'all, passage-ways and staircases. Tenants also attends to their own cookin' arrangements, but Mrs. Stone'll make meals to order from the main kitchen, which was left free for use for that purpose. My job's looking after central-'eatin' and supervisin' the gardens, which need a couple o' men all day except in the late autumn

and winter. They come from the village, too. I got an evacuee cockney chap from London doin' a bit now, sir, but 'e's going back soon. Can't settle 'ere."

They entered the house by the main door and passed into the hall.

"Where did you find Mr. Burt lying, Stone?"

The man pointed to a spot directly below the first turn of the stairs.

Littlejohn looked about him. The place was solidly panelled.

"Any cupboards or places behind the panels under the stairs?"

"No, sir. All the walls is solid enough except the space under the stairs which leads to the cellars."

Littlejohn saw the door and tried it. It was locked and there was no key in it.

"Who has the key to this?"

"There was one, sir, but Mr. Burt took it. You see, there's a lot of liquor down there as Mr. Burt 'ad brought in and he said it was too easy got at from the 'all. We never opened this door. There's another in the kitchen and when Mr. Burt wanted a bottle brought up, he gave me the key of the other door and sent me down."

"Who were the contractors who altered this place for Mr. Burt?"

"London firm, sir, did the last work on it. Two others 'ad to give up on account of the wilful damage done."

"Yes, I've heard about that. Do you remember the name of the last firm?"

"Dumkin and Watts, the name was."

Littlejohn made a note of it. Then they made a further tour of the kitchen and servants' offices.

The former was a great, rambling place with a large stone sink, plate-racks, cupboards and a huge iron cooking-range. The floor was flagged and damp-looking. The quarters seemed no different from those of many another house of equivalent size.

They returned to the hall.

To left and to right were the entrance doors to the Carberry-Peacockes' and the Hartwrights' flats, respectively. Behind the main door, the central switchboard for the whole of the lighting and power of the building. The local police had already tested it for fingerprints after the previous night's escapade, but whoever had put the place in darkness must have worn

gloves. P.C. Lister had departed with the fingerprint men and his relief could be seen coming up the drive.

The tenants of Flats 1 and 2 were at home and gladly allowed the inspector to examine their premises. Both flats were built on similar lines. Dining-room, lounge, main bedroom, smaller bedroom, bathroom and kitchen. The Hartwrights had a loggia outside their living-room and their opposite numbers over the way were compensated for the absence of such a blessing by a spacious larder. Through the window of the latter Mr. Burt had made his spectacular entrance clad in sackcloth.

During Littlejohn's visit, Mrs. Hartwright busied herself with knitting whilst her husband showed the Inspector over the place. There was nothing to attract the attention.

"I hear that you were disturbed by noises, described as hauntings, I think, shortly before Mr. Burt's death, Mr. Hartwright."

"Yes, *sir*. I'll say we were. Just sounded like somebody shooting craps—dice, you call 'em. I understand that certain disreputable gentlemen who once lived in this joint played quite a lot of dice. Played themselves into the debtors' court, eh?"

"How often did you hear this?"

"A night or two, that's all. We just didn't heed it. It'll take more than a gang of crazy, spooky crap-shooters to scare Mrs. Hartwright and me off, after all the money we spent on this little place."

"In the bedroom was it, that you heard the noises?"

"Yes, *sir*."

Littlejohn opened the french window of the bedroom and strode out on the small verandah. He examined the woodwork of the window-frames carefully and then smiled.

"Ever heard of a tick-tock, Mr. Hartwright? We used to play it when I was a boy."

"No. What's that to do with it?"

"We used to tie a large button on the end of a string. Then, we'd pass the string over a pin or tack which we'd fastened to the window-frame, with the button touching the pane. We'd take the other end of the string a distance away, jerk it, and tick-tock the button would go on the pane, scaring those inside out of their skins. That's what seems to have caused your 'crap-shooting.'"

“You meana say that we’ve had a practical joke played on us ...?”

“Looks very much like it. Who told you the tale about the dice-playing ghosts?”

“Carberry-Peacocke. He knows all the dope about this place. Studied the history before he came in.”

“Well. I think I’ll have a word with him, Mr. Hartwright. Thanks for letting me look around. I don’t think the crap-shooters will bother you any more.”

Across the passage Carberry-Peacocke gave Littlejohn a fussy greeting. He hopped about like one with St. Vitus’ dance in his anxiety to show the Inspector the scene of the poltergeist’s activities.

“Are you quite sure nobody climbed in through the larder window like Mr. Burt and played a trick on you? Your neighbour, Mr. Hartwright, was the subject of a practical joke in the matter of the so-called dice-playing. I found the spot where someone anchored a button on a pin over his bedroom window, and did the old schoolboy trick of tapping the pane.”

Carberry-Peacocke’s eyes opened so wide that his glasses fell off.

“NO!” he said. His wife turned pale and clutched her ample bosom.

“Surely, ours wasn’t a trick, Archie?” she whispered, nonplussed, as though afraid that their famous visitor was going to be explained away by natural causes.

“Certainly not, my dear! I know a poltergeist’s work when I see one. So does Professor Heggy. The traces are undeniable.”

“In what way?” asked Littlejohn.

Carberry-Peacocke blinked myopically. Then he began vigorously to polish his rescued pince-nez.

“The violence, the energy!” he said in an awful voice. “No human agency could do such frightful and forceful damage in so short a time. Why, the place was a shambles in less than ten seconds!”

“H’m. I understand that electric fittings like refrigerators were hurled about bodily.”

“Certainly they were. Handled like mere nothings.”

“Did the wiring suffer?”

“No, I can’t say that it did. Why?”

“Well, isn’t it strange that the spook” ... Mr. Carberry-Peacocke winced at the scientific irreverence ... “the spook should be so careful as not to tear

out the wires with the appliances, but carefully disconnect them before chucking them around?”

“Perhaps it is ... I hadn’t thought of it that way.”

Carberry-Peacocke licked his lips and began to contort his face like a man with a tic.

“Another thing, sir,” went on Littlejohn. “I hear from your neighbour, Mr. Hartwright, that you told him the legend about the dice-players.”

“Yes. What of it?”

“You know quite a lot about the history of this place?”

“Yes, I do. I’m interested in that sort of thing.”

“Where did this history come from? Books, records, hearsay?”

“I picked it up in the village. I haven’t read it. Some of the old gaffers in the local inn will tell you all about it for a pint.”

Stone was hanging about the door like an anxious dog again.

“You ever heard tales of that kind, Stone?” called Littlejohn to him.

“What was those, sir?”

“You heard what Mr. Carberry-Peacocke said, didn’t you?”

Stone looked worried.

“Bits of it, like.”

“Well?”

“No. I never heard nothing o’ that sort.”

Again the man was scared and furtive. He knew something he wasn’t going to tell.

Carberry-Peacocke looked uncomfortable, too, and seemed anxious to terminate the interview. Littlejohn left him after thanking him.

“You sure you’ve never heard any of these old-wives’ tales, Stone?” said Littlejohn when they were in the hall again.

“No, I never, sir.”

“Well, you look damned miserable about it. That’s all I can say and I’ll repeat, it’s better for you to tell me anything you know outright before I find it out myself.”

“I don’t know nothin’.”

“Very well.”

“The Professor and the Misses Pott are out, so I’ll have to defer my visit to them....”

“Mr. Williatt left for Brighton for the day, too, sir,” added Stone, now tumbling over himself to mollify Littlejohn.

“That leaves the empty flat ... Number 8. Mr. Brownrigg, isn’t it?”

“Yes, sir. Nobody ever see him. Abroad, I hears.”

“Have you got a key?”

“Pass-key, sir? Yes.”

They climbed to the second floor, passed Braun’s quarters and came to the door of the mysterious unknown’s rooms.

“Tell me, Stone, who are Dr. Braun’s assistants?”

“Mr. Leghe and Mr. Bradley, sir. Pupils of his, they are. Nice gents. Lodging at the Harwood Arms in the village, they are.”

Stone opened the door of the Brownrigg flat.

It was furnished scantily with new stuff. A dining-table, chairs, sideboard, and, in the bedroom, bed and wardrobe.

“Won’t be very comfortable with this little lot,” said the Inspector.

“P’raps intends to buy more when ’e arrives, sir.”

The drawers were empty. The bed was bare and the cupboards contained neither clothing nor the means of making the place habitable. There were no letters. Not a thing to brand the flat as belonging to Brownrigg.

“Desolate ...” murmured Littlejohn.

“Beg pardon, sir.”

“Nothing.”

They returned to the ground floor and Stone guided the detective round the outside of the building.

Bathing-pool, flower-beds, kitchen-garden, they visited them all. Useless to look for clues. The place had been thoroughly combed by the local police and rain had washed away anything else of value.

There were two large greenhouses, renovated, after many years of tumbledown existence, by Burt. Tomatoes were growing in one; in the other, an ancient vine and some cucumbers. The Inspector went in and out of the places and then to the adjacent potting-sheds. The latter were neat and tidy and contained empty bedding-boxes, plant-pots, bags of fertiliser, bulbs on shelves, dahlia tubers in ashes. One hut had evidently not been used for some time, for there was dust on the tools and benches.

“This place not used much, Stone?”

“No, sir. Just a store-place. I uses one end of the little greenhouse for preference. More comfortable and warm. The casual gardeners come here, of course. But they were paid-off after the fruit was got in....”

“Hullo! What have we here?”

From the floor beneath the potting-bench Littlejohn picked up a dusty object and took it to the door to examine it in the better light. It was a made-up moustache such as can be bought from theatrical costumers. A fierce, melodramatic thing of twisted black crepê hair.

“Ever seen this before, Stone?”

“No, sir.”

The man was scared again!

“Any idea what it was used for or who might have used it? Anyone fond of amateur theatricals about here? *Or practical jokes, Stone?*”

Littlejohn looked the man straight in the eyes and Stone wilted visibly.

Then he pulled himself together and his face grew surly but resolute.

“No, sir. I don’t know nobody.”

Littlejohn knew he was lying.

“Very well, Stone. That’ll do for the present.”

The man sheered off to the house, knowing well that he had made a poor show of deceit.

Littlejohn hunted about in other parts of the shed, but found nothing further. At length, he gave it up and returned to the Hall.

As he entered by the front door, he saw the back of Stone disappearing through the entrance of the servants’ quarters. Even the lodge-keeper’s rear view looked uneasy and guilty. What had he been at again?

There was a telephone in a small cubicle off the hall. Littlejohn entered the box and picked up the instrument. The mouthpiece was damp from someone’s breath. He dialled O.

“Number, please?”

“Has this telephone just been used?”

“I’ll put you through to the supervisor. We aren’t allowed to answer enquiries of that kind. Sorrrry.”

“Wait a minute. This is the police.”

There was a click.

“Supervisor....” The performance was repeated.

“Sorry. I’m afraid I don’t know you....”

A helmeted head appeared at that moment peering round the kitchen door. A large, beefy, honest-to-goodness-looking constable materialised.

“Just come here a minute, constable. What’s your name?”

“Bowells, sir.”

Bowells! What a name! Like a synthetic one from a book!

“Do you know the people at the exchange ... what is it? ... Gatley?”

“Yes, sir.” The pantomime went on for a third time. Then the answer came after more delay.

“They say there was a call just before you was speakin’, sir.”

“Where to?”

“Padgley 3746 ... Fighter Command aerodrome that is, sir.”

“Good God!”

Deep waters!

“Do you know anyone stationed there who might be connected with this place?”

“Yessir.”

“Who, Bowells, who, man?”

“Mr. Roger Harwood, sir. Only relative of Mr. Theodore, as usedter be the squire here....”

THE OLD SQUIRE TAKES A NEW LEASE

THEODORE HARWOOD was, as we already know, driven from home by the machinations of Mr. Solomon Burt. But that should not lead us to think that he was turned, destitute, into the streets to beg his bread. Enough was rescued from the wreckage to buy an annuity sufficient to keep the old man and his housekeeper in modest comfort.

So, we find them lodged in Miss Eastwoode's Private Hotel for Retired Gentlepeople, in Kensington. Their fellow guests consisted of twelve ageing or aged ladies and two old men, one a retired colonel and the other a Victorian novelist whose fount of inspiration had long since run dry. Squire Harwood, although older than his male rivals, ousted them from their joint honour as star-boarder and, refusing to keep to his room, held daily court in the public drawing-room. Miss Eastwoode attended personally to his diet and other comforts, and under such favourable treatment the dispossessed landowner took a new lease of life. He found the company of his equals and the constant attention of everyone to his foibles far more exhilarating than a solitary and harassed existence in a tumbledown ruin and grew more vociferous and dictatorial every day.

"Not another of those damned bums, I hope," said Mr. Harwood as the awestruck servant-girl announced that Mr. Littlejohn would like a word with him.

The assembled ladies looked aghast at the thought, clicked their tongues against their teeth in genteel fashion and looked ready to form a bodyguard round their friend.

The colonel and the ex-author, still smarting under their forced abdication, hoped that a boozy-looking man would now be shown in and disgrace the conqueror by taking possession. They almost shook hands with mutual satisfaction when the maid whispered she thought he was from the police.

Miss Eastwoode entered and prevented a panic by inviting Mr. Harwood to meet his visitor in her small private parlour, in which already Littlejohn was cooling his heels amid the smells of cauliflower, which was being served for lunch, and pickled herrings, which were being boiled for goodness knew what.

Littlejohn had decided after the unsatisfactory affair with Stone that it was high time he got to know more about the Harwood family, and who better than the head of it for satisfying his curiosity? So, there he was, for he had obtained the new address of the squire from Mrs. Stone, who reluctantly divulged it and, feeling that until Cromwell's researches into the tenants of the flats were complete, he had little more to be doing in the village.

"What the hell are you hounding me for?" grumbled the old reprobate as he entered the little room. "Haven't I been pestered enough by rogues and swindlers without having the damned police after me, too?"

"I hope you won't take this visit amiss, sir," answered the Inspector tactfully. "You know there's been a murder at your old place and we're at a point in the investigation where we think you can help us."

"If I'd had my way, there'd have been a few more murders. As it is, I'm not interested in running Burt's murderer to earth. He did me a favour.... I'd have done the same meself if I'd been younger and had the stamina. So, I'll bid you good-day."

"Wait a moment, sir. Don't be hasty. I'm only here to help you, or at least one of your family, who's now become involved in the affair...."

"What the devil do you mean? Don't stand there gibbering, man. Out with it.... Not young Roger?"

"I'm afraid so."

The old man's attitude changed immediately. It was easy to see that Roger was the apple of his eye. Harwood seemed to shrivel and grow very old again. He sat in the chair which Littlejohn pushed forward.

"Well?"

"Who is Mr. Roger, in the first place, sir?"

"Never mind; tell me what hot-water he's been getting himself in."

"As far as I can see at present, he's concerned in some plot whereby Burt's property was damaged, the old Hall made the scene of a multitude of silly practical jokes, and, finally, the death of Mr. Burt."

“You’ve no proof of that. Roger’s a decent lad and wouldn’t soil himself by killing a rat like Burt.”

“I don’t know whether you are fully aware of what’s gone on at Harwood Hall since you left....”

“Since I was pitched out neck-and-crop, you mean....”

“That’s as may be. But I’ve found the villagers and especially your old lodge-keepers, Stone and his wife, singularly unhelpful in the murder investigation. I’ve reason to believe that this is due to loyalty to your family, sir....” “You’ve guessed right, there. Most of ’em bred and born on Harwood land with their roots in it. Why should they rat on us to help avenge a damned rogue who’d turn ’em all off and build a lot of blasted semi-detached villas all over their holdings ...?”

“I think they’ve rallied round Mr. Roger, sir....” “God bless ’em. But who’s turned informer?” “I’m not going to say. But this is my reason for calling on you. Mr. Roger is, I understand, a pilot-officer in the R.A.F. Now, we’ve no desire to disturb him at present by a lot of police enquiries. He’s more important work to do than holding himself at our beck and call....”

“He has. I’m proud of him. I’d gladly die myself rather than anything happen to put him off the job he’s set himself.”

“Well then, you help us where you can, sir.”

“What do you want to know? Make it brief. I’m tired.”

The poor old chap looked it, too.

“Mr. Roger is your blood nephew?”

“Yes. Son of my younger brother, killed in the last war. My heir.... Now he’s nothing to inherit.”

“Would it have done him any good to get rid of Burt?”

“What good *could* it have done? The place belongs to a company. No use killing a mere shareholder, even if he *has* controlling interest.”

“What did Mr. Roger do before he joined-up?”

“He was at Cambridge. Taking engineering. I’d scraped enough to send him there. Had nothing but mortgages to leave him, so made up my mind to give him an education so that he could earn his own living. A good boy. Justified my hopes.”

“Now, don’t misunderstand the question, sir. Was he a bit wild?”

Old Harwood cackled.

“Most lads are at his age. Now and then ... boat-race night, eh?”

“Yes. There’s another matter, too. This haunting business, sir.”

Old Harwood looked at him shrewdly. His filmy blue eyes were expressionless.

“Well?”

“I want to know the truth about it. Is there anything in it, sir?”

“Do *you* believe it, Inspector?”

“No, sir.”

“Neither do I. There’s nothing in it. I tell you the truth, although it might go against Roger. Never in the record of the family has there been anything in the way of so-called supernatural disturbance. God knows there might be after what’s gone on there in the way of debauchery in times past, but the excesses have never outlived those who committed ’em.”

“Thank you, sir. That clears the air considerably. But Mr. Burt’s clerk informs us that his late master told him that you made reference to something of the kind when he turned you out.”

“I thought I’d give him a bit of a scare. He looked a yellow-livered wretch. Some of the old women of the village used to amuse themselves and terrify strangers with their inventions, but there was nothing in ’em. They must have something to talk about.”

Littlejohn rose.

“Just one other point, sir, and then I’ll bother you no more. Was anyone else involved—as principal, I mean—in the negotiations, besides Burt?”

Mr. Harwood cackled again.

“Yes. The principal mortgagee of the estate. Fella called Pipkin. Lemuel Pipkin....”

Pipkin! Another awful name, thought Littlejohn and smiled.

“You may well smile, Inspector. Thieves fall out. Burt managed somehow to purchase the debt from Pipkin for less than I owed him. Swindled one of his own kidney, from what I heard. Yes ... and old Pipkin swore he’d be equal with Burt for it when he found out. I’d try Mr. Pipkin, if I were you. Maybe, he killed Burt. A pious sort of humbug is our Mr. Pipkin. As holy as a snake.”

“Well, I’m much obliged by your help, sir. I hope we’ll settle this business without unduly troubling Mr. Roger, but you understand that we must get to the bottom of it.”

“Why?”

Littlejohn left the old squire without answering the question and Harwood tottered to the drawing-room, there to be received by his anxious retinue, who breathed a concerted sigh of relief to see him return without handcuffs and smiling with confidence. In fact, Mr. Harwood seemed to have lost a burden of worry, for his step was more buoyant and his eyes were sparkling. He settled down to put the hearts of his attendant admirers at rest and the two superannuated gentlemen groaned inwardly.

THE SENTIMENTAL FINANCIER

LITTLEJOHN was in for a surprise, for Mr. Lemuel Pipkin was nothing like the person the detective imagined. In the first place, he was a gentile and in the second, he was incurably sentimental.

“Dear me! Dear me!” said Mr. Pipkin to his typist. “How the trials and tribulations of this life seek out the weak spots in a man’s character, don’t they? Better write to this poor unfortunate young man and tell him that if he hasn’t paid up by month-end, I shall have to inform his employers. That will be all, Miss Drew.”

And he folded up and handed her the file of a misguided bank clerk who, two years ago, had borrowed twenty pounds on note of hand and who since had struggled in vain against the growing tide of interest on the debt.

No one cares for me; no one cares for me.
Not a friend in all the world have I.
Once a mother’s love ...

hummed Mr. Pipkin.

He looked like a prosperous country clergyman. Black suit, clean high collar and white tie, round pink face with a beaky nose and innocent-looking blue eyes, topped by a shiny bald head. Meet him on his way home and you’d think he was a delegate to the diocesan conference. Perhaps that was because he was a son of the manse. His father had been a nonconformist parson in a north-country town and his mother had made money by anonymously subsidising a money-lending business, which thrived on making shilling loans on Monday and receiving one-and-a-penny back the following Saturday. It might be truly said that his progenitors lived in Mr. Pipkin, each in a separate logic-tight compartment. Like those little weather-boxes from which emerge Mr. or Mrs. Noah in shine or rain, but never together. In the storms of business out popped Mrs. Pipkin, *mère*; in sunshine, the large-hearted, sentimental parson came out. Only now and

then did the true Lemuel Pipkin show himself at the door. It was not a pleasant sight.

“Mr. George Washington,” announced a scrubby junior clerk with a grin, and returned to his cubby-hole singing to himself: “Jeepers creepers, wheredyer get those peepers?”

As he made his way to see Mr. Pipkin, Littlejohn met the black man disconsolately descending the stairs. Poor George Washington had seen an advertisement benevolently offering to lend from ten to ten thousand pounds on note of hand alone and had been trying his luck. All he had got was a sugary lecture on the evils of getting into debt.

But, thousands and thousands who wander and fall,
Never heard of that heavenly home.
I should like them to know there is room for them all ...

Mr. Pipkin halted. Jeepers Creepers thrust a card before him.

INSPECTOR T. LITTLEJOHN
New Scotland Yard.

At first, the real Lemuel Pipkin rushed out, but was quickly replaced by his father.

“Good afternoon, Inspector,” oozed the financier. “Nothing wrong, I hope.”

Littlejohn himself was surprised at Mr. Pipkin in the flesh. Through the moneylender’s mind swam a phantasmagoria of his victims, dragged calm and still from gas-ovens, dripping from the river, ghastly and contorted from the noose, convulsed from the poison-cup. Or perhaps he himself had slipped-up on his interest charges. He burst into perspiration from head to foot and his underclothes clung to his fleshy body like wet rags.

“I want a talk with you about the late Solomon Burt, Mr. Pipkin,” said Littlejohn.

The moneylender heaved a great sigh of relief.

“Have a cigar, Inspector,” he said.

“No thanks,” said Littlejohn.

They got to grips.

"I'd like some particulars about the business which caused you to say you'd like to strangle Mr. Burt, Mr. Pipkin."

"With pleasure, my dear sir. And when you've heard it you'll probably agree with my sentiments. Perhaps rather forcibly and exaggeratedly expressed in the heat of indignation...."

"Yes?"

"In brief, I held the first mortgage on Harwood Hall, Inspector. I'll be candid. I've nothing to hide...."

Mr. Pipkin pawed the air like a priest blessing the congregation.

".... I lent poor old Mr. Harwood ten thousand on the property. A dear, good man fallen on evil days. My heart bled for him."

"You took a mortgage on the place?"

"Yes, of course. I myself would have been perfectly content on note of hand. But I am a family man and must leave my house in order.

Should this night swift death o'ertake us,
And our couch become our tomb....

"We never know, Inspector."

"Yes, yes. I know all about that, Mr. Pipkin. You had full security in land, bricks and mortar for the loan. Then what?"

"I once fancied that when Mr. Harwood was called home, I might like to do the place up and live there myself. Such lovely country. I'd planned a little surprise in advance for Mrs. Pipkin. Unfortunately, however, she'd also arranged one for me by securing an option on a house at Wittering. I had to give way to the ladies. After that, I lost interest in the hall somewhat."

"Wasn't the place entailed?"

"No. The entail was broken. Mr. Harwood's son—his only child—was killed in the last war. There's only a nephew and some distant relatives in the States."

"So you were anxious to get out?"

"Yes. I felt I could put my money to better use."

"You weren't getting your interest, eh?"

"No. That's true. But, of course, I was prepared to be forbearing with the poor old chap. We never know what we'll come to ourselves, do we?"

And Mr. Pipkin laid bare a double row of disorderly gold-filled teeth.

“Where were you, Mr. Pipkin, on the night of Mr. Burt’s murder?”

Littlejohn gave him the date. He knew beforehand that a man of Pipkin’s type couldn’t possibly murder in the fashion suffered by Burt. Poison or paying a gang of hooligans was more in his line. But not picking up his victim bodily and bouncing him on a marble floor from a great height!

Pipkin was feverishly looking in his diary.

“Ah! Here we are, Inspector. I was at Brighton....”

And then realising that he had confessed to being within a stone’s throw of the scene of the crime, he turned an earthy grey colour, seized his mouth as though attempting to wring it off his face and looked as if he wished the floor would open beneath him.

“.... But I was with my wife, Inspector. I was with my wife.”

“Naturally. And I take it you were in bed, too.”

“At three a.m.! I should say so! Sleeping at the side of my wife. She’s a light sleeper and I could never have got out of the room without rousing her.”

“No one’s suggesting you did. Alibis for the small hours are difficult to find.”

“My wife will confirm it.”

“That would hardly be a good alibi, Mr. Pipkin. Most wives are loyal to their husbands to the point of perjury, you know.”

Mr. Pipkin pressed a bell at his elbow and the dainty Miss Drew entered with a query in her large blue eyes and a smile on her gold-digger’s face.

“Get Mrs. Pipkin on the ’phone at once, Miss Drew ... I insist that you check this immediately without giving me a chance of priming her....”

Mrs. Pipkin was eventually obtained and Littlejohn, after a lot of explanations, managed to confirm her husband’s statement. The lady sounded angry at what she thought was an inquisition into her husband’s fidelity. She had a loud voice which made the telephone rattle and shake and the Inspector was relieved to hang up.

“I’m glad of that, Inspector,” smiled Mr. Pipkin when it was over. “Decency is the main branch of our family roof-tree. Would that the same could be said of the Harwood Hall roof-tree, eh?”

“What do you mean?”

“Surely you’ve heard, Inspector. Why, the place is a sink of iniquity. A secluded bordel, if I may use such a term. I’m glad I’m out of it.”

“Now, now, Mr. Pipkin. Don’t talk rashly. Burt is dead. You’ve nothing to gain by depreciating the property in that fashion.”

“But it’s true, Inspector.”

“Mr. Pipkin. The tenants consist of two married couples, a middle-aged and cantankerous professor, two maiden ladies, sisters, a bachelor, and, until his death, the late Mr. Burt. You’d be wise not to repeat your statement in public.”

Mr. Pipkin grew excited.

“What about the actress? The Freyle woman. Subsidised, she was. A well-known man paying her rent there and all that. And as for the maiden ladies. Pott, aren’t they called? Well, the younger is living in sin. I repeat, living in sin with the playwright fellow, Williatt. Her deaf sister’s a mere decoy-duck, giving her the stamp of respectability. Not that the deaf one knows. But how convenient to be deaf! Why, the affair’s been going on for years.”

“Where did you get that information, Mr. Pipkin?”

Lemuel Pipkin looked uneasy.

“I must confess that I made up my mind to break Burt if I could, for the trick he’d done on me. I had a man, a private enquiry-agent, look up the tenants. If they weren’t all respectable, I was prepared to make a song about it. In the public interest, of course.”

“Of course.”

“Such hives of vice should not be tolerated. There’s too much of that sort of thing these days...”

“So you tried to find as much dirty linen for a public washing as you could?”

“Now, don’t put it that way, Inspector. You are unjust.”

“By the way, Mr. Pipkin, you didn’t hit upon the bright idea of getting the place a reputation for being haunted, did you? And thus clearing it of tenants. Practical-joking to look like spooks, I mean.”

“No. On my word, Inspector.”

Mr. Pipkin looked startled again. He had once more put his foot in it.

Littlejohn rose to go.

“I may call again, Mr. Pipkin, if any further points arise. Needless to say, we’ll investigate what you’ve told us.”

Mr. Pipkin said he would be delighted to help in any way and accompanied his visitor to the shabby landing of his offices.

On the way down, Littlejohn met a Hindu gentleman, ascending with features glowing with hope....

WHIRLIGIG

LITTLEJOHN lunched belatedly at one of his favourite haunts off the Haymarket and, scanning a newspaper which someone had left on the table, saw that Miss Elaine Freyle was starring at the Whirligig Theatre in a show which maintained perpetual motion from noon until midnight.

He felt that a quarter of an hour with that young lady might not be wasted.

He had to show his warrant-card and assume his most unbending manner before the stage-door keeper would admit him to the hive of industry just off Leicester Square.

Littlejohn had one or two surprises behind stage.

In the first place, nothing in the nature of high-speed pandemonium reigned as scene and turn followed scene and turn in that non-stop whirlwind of scantily-dressed beauty, snappy songs and risky wit. Calm and order prevailed and quite a number of leisurely, sophisticated-looking people, whom he didn't know from Adam, greeted him cheerily and fraternally, as though he might be a fellow artist on his way to crack a few jokes as near the bone as possible and then wait his turn until the whirligig had completed full circle again.

The next surprise was Miss Freyle herself. Nothing of the gold-digger or fluffy fast-worker about her. When Littlejohn entered her dressing-room she had just finished her act, which consisted of clever impersonations of contemporaries of stage and screen, with here and there a politician thrown in for a change. She was wearing a very becoming evening-gown, modest as things went in that place, and received her visitor with what seemed to be eager anticipation.

Littlejohn, having heard the nature of her performances, wondered whether or not he himself might be included in her next bunch of new characters on the stage....

The dressing-room was unlike anything of its kind Littlejohn had seen before. Nothing of the old vaudeville quarters occupied by a different star every week, a here-to-day-gone-to-morrow sort of place, reeking of grease-paint and pent-up air. This was a well-lighted room with comfortable furniture and a good healthy atmosphere. Obviously prepared by its present occupant with taste and for an extensive stay.

Elaine Freyle was tall, slender and had jet-black hair. Regular features, clever face and a look of intelligence. Large generous mouth and twinkling eyes. She gave the Inspector a firm handshake.

Littlejohn told her what he wanted.

“What attracted you to Harwood Hall in the first place, Miss Freyle?”

She replied without hesitation.

“I met Burt several times. Nothing nastier than usual about him for his type. A business man, a bit stupid, who liked to show-off. At a party we held on the stage here to celebrate the hundredth performance, he told me he had the very place for me in his new block of flats at Harwood. Said it was a lovely spot for a rest and a change. He would give me a tenancy on the most favourable terms in the best of the flats.”

“Was he making a free offer?”

Miss Freyle screwed up her nose and laughed.

“I think he was really, but one gets used to that kind of thing, you know! However, his description was so thrilling that I turned him over to my fiancé, Rex Purleigh, who’s financing this show. Mr. Burt sort of lost interest a bit then, but we kept him to it. We ran down to Harwood the following day and I was quite taken with the idea. A sweet situation and an awfully jolly flat. I took a tenancy and Rex agreed that we’d make a double flat of it after we’d been married. That’s the honest-to-God truth about it, whatever anybody else might say and whatever you’ve heard from those ghastly tenants....”

“Ghastly?”

“When I moved in and found what I’d got in the way of stable-companions, I nearly had a fit! Braun, the Carberry-Peacocks, the Pottses and that howling cad Williatt ... brrr ... what a lot!”

She then proceeded to give impersonations of them with such skill and realism that Littlejohn lost all his professional restraint and laughed loudly.

“But why in particular did you take such a violent dislike to them? After all, it’s not a boarding-house where you all meet at the long table every meal and get on each others’ nerves.”

“Oh, they all started to dislike *me* first. Sounds like persecution mania, doesn’t it? But it’s true. You see, the rumour had got there ahead of me that I was Burt’s kept-woman! I overheard whispers between the Hartwright and the Peacocke women. You should have seen them draw in their skirts and bare their teeth whenever we met! Virtue with the lid off!”

She gave some more shattering caricatures, which made Littlejohn decide to bring his wife to see Miss Freyle at work properly as soon as he’d solved his case.

“Quite apart from your professional impressions, Miss Freyle, can you tell me any more about your former cotenants?”

“Nothing much. I was only there about a week. But there’s an affair going on between Williatt and the younger Miss Pott; rather a striking girl, I thought, though older than Williatt I’d guess. And Williatt is tired of it, as one might expect. Public-philanderer number one is Arthur Williatt. The elder Miss Pott’s rather a dear old duffer. The Carberry-Peacockes have a son in gaol. The Hartwright’s aren’t proper Americans, or I’m a Dutchman. I don’t know anything about old Braun, except that he’s an ill-mannered boor, who talks *about* being Viennese, but doesn’t talk *like* one. His accent’s Bavarian.”

Littlejohn took a deep breath, like a swimmer coming up for air, after this fusillade of thumb-nail sketches.

“How in the world did you discover all that in a week, Miss Freyle?”

“My job, Inspector. I must notice little things, you know. Little habits. Ways of speech. Mannerisms.”

“Well, can you give me some details of how you found out this little budget of facts?”

“Mostly eavesdropping, Inspector, of which I’m not a bit ashamed. I overheard the Peacockes reading a letter in the garden. They thought they were alone and *he* was nearly off his head with rage. I can’t tell you word for word what it was all about, but he was saying it was a damned shame the way they were torturing his boy. In gaol like a felon and being treated like a dog.... And he gave a sort of blood-curdling chuckle, then, just like a

madman, as if he had something awful up his sleeve. At that, Stone appeared on the scene so I sheered off.

“As for the Hartwrights. If they *are* American citizens, then they’ve been Hungarian or something before that. There’s an undertone of continental accent in *his* speech that’s almost hidden by his drawl, but it’s there. One of our fiddlers in the orchestra, a naturalised Hungarian, has just the same tone.... Same with Braun. I went to school at Lausanne. I was taught Swiss-German. Then there’s Viennese German, Bavarian German, Prussian German. You know, like Cockney or Lancashire English. I might be wrong, but I think I place Braun in the Bavarian class.

“I overheard the younger Miss Pott pleading with Williatt not to be so difficult and he was saying you couldn’t be too careful with all that lot about. After all, he said, he’d got a wife.... The wretched little swine!”

Each account was illustrated by a realistic little vignette of the character discussed.

“Now, Miss Freyle, what about the haunting business?”

Elaine Freyle seemed to wrestle with her feelings for a moment and then laughed outright.

“Can you keep a secret, Inspector? A very strict secret?”

“Within reason, Miss Freyle.”

“Very well. I’d better tell you. After a week of the company at Harwood, I’d had enough. It was getting like a private asylum and I wanted to be packing my traps and getting out of it. But I’d a three years’ lease!”

“Yes?”

“*There wasn’t any haunting* as far as I was concerned, except by the tenants, whose looks and manners haunted me in broad daylight as well as at night.”

“Ah!”

“But you can’t break a contract—especially one of Solly Burt’s—because you don’t like the look of the faces of your neighbours. So, as they were all chattering about spooks, I thought I’d have a few private ones of my own. You see, I thought *their* tales were efforts to get out for the same reason as mine. I thought they didn’t like *my* face. I made up the yarn about the hot and cold temperatures.... What do you think of me, Inspector?”

“Highly irregular, I ought to say. But no more ridiculous than the rest and concocted with far more justification.”

“Thanks, Inspector. You’re a dear.”

Littlejohn blushed. Wait until he told Letty that he’d been called a dear by a pretty girl from the Whirligig!

“.... But I *did* act as though my spooks existed. I moved out. The rest just whined and put up with it. I told Burt my tale and pretended to have hysterics. I said I’d move out whether he sued me or not. In fact, I’d thoughts of suing *him*. I wouldn’t stay another night in his beastly flat. He was almost paying *me* damages before I’d finished with him. At length, he agreed to tear up the contract if I’d keep mum about the ghosts. Bad for business and the reputation of his lovely property and all that.”

“Well, that clears that up, Miss Freyle. You’ve been a great help and I’m grateful for the time you’ve spared for it.”

“Don’t mention it. I want to help. Although Solly Burt was a pain in the neck and I didn’t enjoy his wretched old flat a bit, he wasn’t the sort I’d have wished a sticky end for....”

Here the interview was abruptly broken by the intrusion round the door of a horse-faced, large-toothed, inane-looking head.

“What about a spot of food, old girl?” it said.... “Oh, sorry. Hadn’t seen the jolly old visitor ... make myself scarce.”

“Come in, Rex. This is Inspector Littlejohn from Scotland Yard. He’s enquiring into the death of Solly Burt.”

Horse-face seemed delighted and wrung Littlejohn cordially by the hand.

“Howling shame about old Solly,” he said. “Not playin’ the game, chuckin’ the poor old devil over the jolly old staircase, eh, what? What about a li’l drink, eh? Elaine, my dear gel, you haven’t been the hospitable hostess. Trot out the home-brew, that’s a good gel.”

Purleigh began to busy himself at a cabinet in one corner until Littlejohn told him that he didn’t drink on duty. Whereas he suspended his activities in pained surprise for a moment. Then he revived and after asking to be forgiven for taking a li’l drink himself, poured about half a pint of whisky down his throat.

Littlejohn had had enough of Purleigh already. The fellow talked as if he had a plum in his mouth.

Blah, blub, blah, blub.

With a sort of muffled obbligato of half-intelligible words running beneath the plum.

What some women can see in some men ...!

The Inspector thanked the pair of them again and was bidden a very cordial good-bye. As he sought his way to the open air, Littlejohn heard the thick voice of Mr. Purleigh giving him a public testimonial.

“Jolly good fellah, eh, what?” came down the corridor with loud goodwill and there followed the noise of more corks being drawn.

PRIVATE LIVES

ON his way back to Victoria from the Whirligig, Littlejohn decided to call at the Dunstanby Hotel to investigate a matter which had been intriguing him for some time. Who was Brownrigg? As far as he could gather, nobody had ever set eyes on the fellow. He had taken the flat at Harwood Park, paid his rent in advance and now the place was closed and no tenant had yet shown up.

The Dunstanby is like many others of its type in the Hyde Park neighbourhood. It caters partly for a regular set of provincial and country clients and also has a fair proportion of permanent residents. Members of both categories were pottering about in the thickly carpeted hall when the Inspector entered through the revolving door. The hall-porter, clad in immaculate uniform, was busy answering the telephone on behalf of an irritable-looking elderly man, turning-up trains in a time-table for two fussy old ladies, sending a page-boy about his business, and keeping a watchful eye on two slow-moving workmen who were making alterations to the elaborate chandelier. He gave Littlejohn a challenging glance as the Inspector stepped on the mat and seemed about to take him in his stride along with his other responsibilities.

“Damme, the fellah *must* be at home ... give me the telephone!” blustered the elderly man, turning purple.

“You’re sure it’s from Paddington and not Marylebone?” asked the ladies in deferential chorus.

The attitude of the page-boy was far too cheeky and the electrician missed his footing on the tall ladder, clutched the chandelier to his bosom and swung on it in wild abandon.

Littlejohn by-passed the turmoil by accosting a pretty but subdued young lady standing behind a counter, gave her his card, and asked to see the manager.

The hall-porter looked very put-out.

The manager resembled Kaiser Wilhelm II in his prime. He emerged from a small pen of opaque glass through which glowed the green shade of a desk lamp and swept Littlejohn out of public view as if he were a dark secret likely to drive away all his clients if allowed to prowl around unchecked.

“Not trouble, I hope.... Not after one of our clients? Most respectable and would hate any fuss,” said the manager.

He had a suave manner, but Littlejohn guessed that he was a devil behind the scenes. He looked as if he had been up all night.

“No, sir. Just a routine enquiry about a one-time client of yours whom we can’t seem to trace. A Mr. Brownrigg. He wrote from here on your notepaper on May 8th last....”

The manager heaved a great sigh of relief. Intelligence Officers were always in and out of the place seeking traces of undesirable aliens. He was proud of the promptness with which he was able to answer such questions. He had an impeccable filing-system embracing all clients who had come and gone during his reign. Some of the cards were marked with a large red cross. Such an ornament ensured that whenever the person to whom it was awarded wrote for a room, the hotel was full-up.

Mr. Reamer, the manager, proudly turned to his files, pulled out a drawer and mincingly ran his podgy fingers along the top edge of a series of neat cards. Littlejohn watched him with an amused grin. “This little pig went to market, this little pig stayed at home!”

Kaiser Bill was getting warmer.

“Brown, Brown, Brown, Brown,” he intoned. “Brownacres, Brownaway....” Just like a parlour game. Smiling and then frowning according to the history of the clan and its unheard-of ramifications.

Brownleaves and even a Robert Browning, but no Brownrigg at all. Mr. Reamer shrugged his shoulders in despair.

“Can non-residents take meals here, sir?”

“Oh, yes....”

“And use your writing-rooms and stationery?”

“Yes. We don’t like it, but what can one do?”

“That’s it, then. Mr. Brownrigg must have been a casual.”

A thought struck the detective.

“May I use your ’phone, Mr. Reamer?”

“Certainly.... Directory?”

Littlejohn found and dialled the number of Mr. Burt’s offices. The languid voice of Mr. Stagg was heard speaking at the other end.

“Inspector Littlejohn here, Mr. Stagg....”

You could almost feel the estate agent bracing himself for an ordeal.

“Oh, Mr. Stagg ... how did Brownrigg pay his rent? Cheque, banknotes ...?”

“Just a minute, Inspector.”

Mr. Stagg could be heard ordering his women about.

“Hello! In cash, Inspector. A registered parcel containing soiled one-pound notes. Funny, eh? But they spend like anything else, so we didn’t mind. Anything wrong?”

“No thanks, Mr. Stagg. Much obliged.”

Littlejohn thanked the hotel manager and went on his way, past the hall-porter again, this time tying a bandage on the finger of a small boy whose sister had stabbed him with a pen-nib.

“Brownrigg,” said the Inspector to himself as he descended the hotel steps in search of his bus to Victoria. “I don’t believe there’s no such a person!”

Light was beginning to dawn on the matter of the ghost of Harwood Hall and the fictitious Mr. Brownrigg!

Cromwell arrived back at Harwood in time for a late tea and was proud of his day’s labours. They sat down to corned-beef and tinned beans.

“What! More beans!” said Cromwell.

Mrs. Stone had been subdued of late, but this challenge cut her to the quick.

“If some people had to travel nine miles to shop on account of evacuees buyin’-up the village store and then queue-up for ’ours at once with varicose veins p’r’aps they’d be less fine-mouthed and hoity-toity....”

The rest was cut-off by the ringing of the telephone.

Littlejohn answered it.

“Yes ... Littlejohn here. Who? Oh, yes. To-morrow morning at eleven. Right, I’ll expect you.”

He hung up the instrument.

“Well, well.”

Cromwell's mouth was full of food, but his eyebrows and his Adam's-apple were eloquent.

"That's Pilot-Officer Roger Harwood. Wants to see me and have a chat to-morrow morning. Things are beginning to move, eh?"

After tea, Cromwell produced the written results of his day's efforts.

"By the way, sir," began Cromwell, "as I was coming in, I met one of the men from Dumkin and Watts, the contractors who altered this place for Burt. He was the foreman on the job and had called to see that everything was O.K., being in the district. I asked him right out if they'd come across any secret passages or hidden rooms while they were at it. He used some choice language about the accidents that happened, but said they'd been all over the place and that he'd stake his professional reputation that there wasn't a one."

"That only confirms what old Harwood implied to-day when I saw him. Very useful."

They set about reading each other's notes. Cromwell had collected a lot of matter from Scotland Yard, who, in turn, had been quizzing the local police of areas where the present Harwood Hall tenants had formerly lived.

As was his custom, Littlejohn began what he called the boiling-down process whereby he cut out surplus matter and reduced the whole of the collection to a size reasonable enough to cover a few pages of his notebook. The detectives exchanged sheets of remarks, minutes, news from files and local stations, some neatly typewritten, some in Littlejohn's tidy hand and a lot more in Cromwell's rather flowery writing.

In the end they had a respectable summary of their day's researches.

Whilst Cromwell read his chief's accounts of the visits to Squire Harwood, the Whirligig, the Dunstanby Hotel, with a comic interlude at Pipkin's office, Littlejohn copied his subordinate's summary in his book:

BRITISH MUSEUM: Harwood history turned up from book, Harwoods of Harwood, by Margaret Harwood (1907), showed no trace of ghosts or such. Being one of the family, the writer gilds the gingerbread a bit, but it seems that certain lively Harwoods in the Regency period painted the town red. Brighton very handy and riotous living indulged in, with the Regent often at the Hall. No other criminal record in family. Present owner, Theodore, apparently a harmless member of family.

BRAUN: Reference books give: Born Vienna 1875. Ph.D., Vienna, Tübingen, Marburg. Prof. of Anthropology Univ. of Linz. Member Anthropol. Societies Paris, Munich, Berlin, Milan. Publications: *Kulturphilosophie*. Papers in *Internationale Zeitschrift für Anthropologie* translated into English by M. Bickers, Ph.D.

Researches into tombs of early settlers in Pustertal and Thuringia....

(Here Littlejohn gave it up. Cromwell's meticulous transcription stunned him.)

He continued:

BRAUN certified by Home Office as friendly alien (Austrian Social Democrat). Good conduct and character and other testimonies given by Master and Fellows of Benfield College, Cambridge.

CARBERRY-PEACOCKES: Details obtained from Burt's letting-agent confirmed. Purley police have no record against him, but his son is in Brixton Gaol for association with Fascist Union. Parents not known to have such sympathies, but left neighbourhood when son interned. Neighbours questioned by police said that C.-P. was a tea-merchant when in Purley, and worked in City. Enthusiastic wireless amateur and onetime ran a transmitting station.

HARTWRIGHTS: Nothing known about them. U.S. Embassy merely confirm passports in order. Regular reports with police. Bankers simply know that they are well-to-do. Yard cabling American police.

THE MISSES POTT: Nothing whatever against them. Seem to have led very quiet and respectable lives. Left house in St. John's Wood to live at private hotel, Cedars, Epsom, but only stayed there ten days, evidently having found flat more suitable. Manageress of Cedars can tell us nothing useful about them. Agnes deaf and stayed indoors when sister not with her. Sister frequently went to town, apparently on business.

BROWNRIGG: Blank.

"Well," said Littlejohn as he pocketed his pencil. "There's not much fresh in that lot, Cromwell. But don't be disappointed. It represents a good day's

work and brings to light something interesting about the Carberry-Peacockes. Mr. C.-P. specialised in receiving and transmitting sets, did he? We must look into that. And his son's a Fascist. Still more intriguing. This is becoming a job for Special Branch, but before bringing them in, we'd better check-up a thing or two. We'll look at Mr. Carberry-Peacocke's flat next time he's out, I think. Highly irregular, but expedient. We've not seen Mr. Williatt, either. I gather he's a cad. And however rude he may be, old Braun's giving us an interview to-morrow, too. On second thoughts, I think I'll pursue the Braun angle a bit further. Yes. I'll take a trip to Cambridge myself and see the johnnies at Benfield College. I'd like to know more about Braun than records contain or the Home Office are inclined to give."

Cromwell fumbled among the papers he had been laboriously reading.

"We can tick off Miss Freyle. We suspect that Brownrigg doesn't exist. We know that Williatt's a wrong-'un and is carrying on with the younger Miss Pott although a married man. And Hartwright and the Carberry-Peacockes are fishy, according to Miss Freyle. Not so bad. Things are taking shape. Oh, and incidentally, this place isn't officially on the haunted-house list."

He mused a bit.

"But why, sir, why doesn't Brownrigg exist?"

"Well," replied Littlejohn, "I'd say one of two things. Somebody doesn't want any more neighbours in the flats so, to secure the last vacant one, created a fictitious tenant and paid the rent. Or else, maybe, somebody's going to change his identity and have a place to turn to when he becomes Brownrigg. That is, of course, assuming that the man doesn't exist and hasn't got himself tied-up in Europe and can't get away. There's a trace of similarity between Braun and Brownrigg, too, eh? Brownrigg's the English equivalent of the German Braun, I'd say, with a bit on the end for variety."

Cromwell yawned.

"I'm sleepy," he said.

"No use doing any more to-night," answered Littlejohn, knowing that his subordinate had much personal routine to get through before eventually reaching his bed. "I'll see young Harwood in the morning; then I'll trek to Cambridge. Bit of a fag, but we must be sure about Braun. Williatt's in London, expected back any train; arranging a new show I hear. We're keeping an eye on him. If he's not back to-morrow, we'll rout him out for a

talk. Time we saw the blighter. But matters are moving, although I can't see the connection between the various bits and pieces yet. It'll come, though. Patience, *mon brave*."

"Eh?"

"Patience."

"Yes. Patience."

"Let's turn in, then. I'll ring up Benfield in the morning and see if the old boys are at home."

Cromwell rose.

"Oh, I'd forgotten," he said, and he went to his overcoat and fished in its capacious pockets.

Returning, he placed two revolvers on the table.

"Ready for the shooting-match," he added, and went off to fill his hot-water bottle at the bathroom tap.

CONFESSION

PILOT-OFFICER HARWOOD was in time for his appointment.

As, from his window, Littlejohn watched the young airman come striding up the drive, a fine figure of a youngster, head erect, arms swinging, he wondered what sort of an interview he was in for.

Stone was pottering about on the front lawn at the time and rose from trying to look busy when he heard the approaching footsteps. Roger Harwood greeted him with a smile and a buoyant flick of his gloves and then paused for a word or two with him. Stone seemed transfigured with pride at thus being recognised and turned apprehensively to watch his young gentleman enter the Hall.

The greeting between the Inspector and the airman was friendly. Handshakes were exchanged. Harwood looked Littlejohn straight in the face.

They made themselves comfortable in the late Mr. Burt's expensive club-chairs.

"And now, sir, what can I do for you?" asked Littlejohn formally by way of an opening move.

Harwood removed his pipe and gazed steadily at the glowing contents of the bowl as though wondering how to begin.

"Well ... I hear from Stone that you are hot on my track in connection with the haunting of this place and I thought I'd better come and see you personally and have it out with you."

"You ... haunting the place?" exclaimed Littlejohn, apparently alarmed. He suspected as much, but didn't rush to cramp the young airman's style by an anti-climax at the outset.

"Yes. I'd better begin at the beginning. It's not a long tale. And perhaps it's a damned silly one, but I've got to get it off my chest. I didn't intend interfering unless innocent parties became involved. Now, as half the villagers seem to be under a cloud of suspicion, I'd better begin and clear

them at once ... Stone and the rest of 'em. Out of sheer loyalty to the old family, I learn, they've refused to co-operate with the police and got themselves in very bad odour with you."

"Ah!"

"You sound as if you agree."

"Yes."

"It began with the arrival of Burt on the scene. The first we knew was that he'd bought out the mortgages, called in the debts and, because uncle couldn't pay-up, foreclosed and took over. Just like the old melodramas. The old chap was booted out. I was furious; like the rest of the village. Not only at the way the old man had been treated, but at the vandalism on the Hall itself. I loved this place. Look at it now! Almost like the cosmopolitan pavilion at a universal exhibition.

"I more or less controlled my fury, Inspector, until Burt started strutting about the village boasting how he was going to make it into a sort of bungalow town. That did it! I was staying at the local pub at the time and whenever I moved, I had the sight of contractors' lorries churning up the drive of the Hall, carting stuff there, with a whole army of workmen, joinering, plumbing, wiring and generally ruining the grace of the place.

"I was just down from Cambridge and I'd still plenty of student wildness in my blood. I made up my mind to give old Burt something for his money. The grandest rag ever concocted! I sent for some pals and we started the haunting. We had to tell some of the villagers of our plan; otherwise they might have loosed-off shotguns at us."

"We set about the plumbing and wiring first and as fast as the contractors plumbed and wired, we undid it. One night, in our enthusiasm, we nearly broke our necks. We were hunting for the electric wires between the floorboards and put our feet through the ceiling. Brought down the whole shooting-match. You've probably heard of all we did."

"I have."

"Seems a bit silly now, I admit. We couldn't expect to keep it up against a chap like Burt."

Harwood looked sheepish.

"When one thinks what we're up against now.... But to us at the time it was a hell of a lark."

"What about the ducking?"

Littlejohn's eyes twinkled.

"Oh, yes. That ended the whole carnival on a top note. We dressed ourselves in some of the togs we'd worn at the last Arts Ball. We climbed into Burt's room up a ladder we found, scared him stiff and then made him take a header into his damned silly bathing-pool."

"And then ...?"

"We toddled-off to the potting-shed and changed back into our normal gear...."

"I found a part of your whiskers there!"

"So Stone told me over the 'phone."

"Did he, by gad?"

"Yes. The day after we'd ducked Burt, we heard that he'd taken a toss over the staircase and broken his neck."

"It was murder, you know."

"So I learned later."

"You're sure your part of the escapade ended with the ducking?"

"Quite. The others will confirm that ... but I'd rather not mention names. They're both officers in the Army now and being brought into this affair might cause a hell of a stink for them."

Littlejohn knew instinctively that Harwood told the truth.

"We might be able to keep this prank off the records. At least we can do our best...."

"Awfully decent of you, Inspector. Anything I can do, of course...."

"Did you haunt any of the other tenants?"

"We did a bit of button-tapping on one of the windows and a rum-looking bloke chased out and broke the blackout regulations. A bit childish...."

"Anything in the way of poltergeists?"

"Eh?"

"A poltergeist's a mischievous and violent ghost. Throws things about. Smashes crockery and furniture. Heaves about gas stoves and refrigerators...."

"Hell's bells! We didn't rise to that. I've told you all our repertoire, I think."

"Well, that's a big help. We know that your pranks were taken as cover for more dangerous work. I'm glad you came forward of your own accord. It's cleared the air."

“I wanted the whole business settled. Those fellows in the village are quite innocent of anything in the matter. And Stone can face you again with an easy conscience. Besides, when it comes to killing in cold blood, I draw the line. I ought to have seen you sooner, but I was too busy with other things. You know how it is these times?”

“Sure. Well, good-luck, sir, and thanks again.”

“So long, Inspector. Good hunting.”

“And the same to you, sir.”

They shook hands again.

Young Harwood strode jauntily on his way down the drive, stopping to reassure Stone who was still hanging about like a faithful dog. Then he halted for a kindly word with Mrs. Stone, who emerged from the lodge carrying a bucket of hen food. Littlejohn watched him from the window until he disappeared from sight and wished he had such a son.

That finished the ghosts for good and all.

Now for the tangible killer!

THE APPREHENSIVE DON

LITTLEJOHN had a good half-hour to spare before meeting the Master of Benfield and decided to pass the time by calling at the Cambridge branch of the Home Counties Bank with a view to wringing from them as much information concerning the finances of Dr. Braun as possible. He anticipated a difficult passage in this respect, for he knew the reluctance with which banks disclose their customers' affairs. But he received a pleasant surprise.

The Home Counties Bank branch in Cambridge was formerly the private bank of Dalrymple, Hussey and Co., which was taken over, lock, stock and barrel by the joint-stock concern in 1919. With a view to preserving the good-will of the place, one of the old private banking family had always been in charge there, even under the new regime. Littlejohn, therefore, found himself ushered into the presence of Mr. Hussey-Dalrymple, a tall, thin young man of seven and twenty with the almost impudent self-confidence of a true aristocrat. He had a determined face like that of a disdainful pug dog, but a carefree way of banking. He wore a shirt of startling design and a soft collar with long roving points held together by a tie which looked as if it had been torn from an old tweed suit. As he crossed his legs he displayed a large hole in the heel of his stocking.

Mr. Hussey-Dalrymple did not care a damn for Head Office. He made this quite plain to Littlejohn when the Inspector mentioned the purpose of his visit. He was, he said, awaiting his call-up to the Fleet Air Arm and might as well begin at that moment in rooting-out the bloody Huns.

On the finances of Dr. Braun the young banker was quite frank.

"Old Braun arrived here before the war and parked himself on Chalmers, Master of Benfield—a dear old feller, but a bit goofy—and opened an account with me on Chalmers' introduction. The Home Office said he was O.K., so I took him. He's given us no trouble."

“Where does he get his money from, sir?” asked Littlejohn. “He’s living in an expensive flat in Sussex and keeping two assistants and doesn’t seem short.”

“Money. The feller’s rolling in it. Confidentially, I’ll tell you, Inspector, he brought with him about twenty thousand pounds in bearer bonds—good English stuff—and deposited ’em here for safe-keeping. How in blazes he got all that out of Germany, I don’t know. When I went there the year before the war on a bit of a holiday, it took the blighters all their time to let me out with twenty quid. Mind you, Braun’s securities are in small bulk ... high denominations, and he travelled by air through Switzerland. But he must have been a conjuror to get ’em past the Nazi frontier chaps ... the swine!”

Littlejohn had learned all he wanted. All withdrawals from Braun’s account were to self in cash and in reasonable sums. There were no payments to credit, except proceeds of realised securities on which the doctor was living.

After taking a cup of coffee with Mr. Dalrymple, the Inspector thanked him, wished him well and made for Benfield College.

Mr. Chalmers, the Master, had been rather correctly described as goofy by the young banker, for he was a superannuated mathematician who lived in an abstruse world of his own and only occasionally descended from it. He met Littlejohn in a cosy, book-lined study where he was taking his morning cup of tea with the bursar and another little Fellow named Scrope, who seemed inordinately timid and apprehensive, as though himself expecting to be arrested on the spot.

“I’m very pleased to meet you, Inspector,” twittered Scrope as the Master introduced him to Littlejohn. “I have never been in the company of a real detective before—to say nothing of holding converse with one.”

The Master himself was a small, tubby man, with snow-white hair spreading like silk over his coat collar. Pink complexion, long pointed nose and easy-going mouth, which seemed made of india rubber as he applied it to pieces of very yellow slab-cake.

“There’s not much I can say, Inspector Meiklejohn,” he said, dusting the crumbs from his waistcoat. “Braun’s a good chap. I’d vouch for him anywhere. I’ve guaranteed him to the Home Office, because I’ve known him all my life. He’s one of those poor scholars whom the National Socialists can’t leave alone because in his youth he was a Social Democrat.

All he wants now is peace in which to pursue his studies. I shall do my best to see that he gets it.”

“I appreciate that, sir,” answered Littlejohn. “The universities have done great work in that respect. But we want to be quite sure that he’s a genuine case. We can’t be too careful now that we’re at war with Germany.”

Chalmers raised his hands despairingly.

“My dear Inspector Applejohn, I can assure you that Braun’s as innocent as a child....”

So are you, in your otherworldly atmosphere, thought Littlejohn. The Inspector gazed through the window at the old lawns and trim flower-beds of Benfield. Might be a million miles away from the war, just like old Chalmers.

“...I was with him at Marburg more than forty years ago. We have met frequently since. I’ve never found Braun to be anything but a scholar and a philosopher of the best type, craving only quiet and seclusion in which to study and write.”

“Is he Austrian?”

“I ... ahem ... I think he was born in Vienna. I think so.”

“H’m.”

“Yes, Vienna,” interposed the bursar, who was more businesslike. “I remember our filling-in the forms for the Home Office. Born Vienna, educated from early days in Munich, Tübingen and Marburg. Held his last post in Austria, at the University of Linz.”

“Well, thank you, gentlemen, for your confirmation of Dr. Braun’s good name. That relieves us somewhat.”

“Very pleased indeed to be of service, both to you and my old friend,” replied the Master and, levering himself from his armchair and showering the carpet with more crumbs of yellow cake, he lead Littlejohn from the room, affectionately placing his arm round the Inspector’s broad shoulders.

Littlejohn, making his way somewhat despondently back to the main entrance, was surprised to find little Mr. Scrope at his elbow.

“My dear Inspector ... let me see now, your name’s Littlejohn, isn’t it ...? My dear Inspector Littlejohn, pray do me the honour of taking a glass of sherry with me in my quarters. As I said, this is the first opportunity I’ve had of talking with a detective from Scotland Yard....”

Mr. Scrope resembled a robin, with bright eyes, chubby face and a nose like a little beak. His face crinkled expectantly as he looked up at Littlejohn.

In his dotage, thought Littlejohn, but he couldn't find it in his heart to refuse. Besides, he'd an hour for his train.

Scrope opened a door and ushered the Inspector into his cosy study. Hulloo! What's this? thought Littlejohn as the old Fellow turned the key in the lock.

Scrope looked delightedly conspiratorial. First, he brought out a bottle of sherry and filled two glasses.

"Your very good health, Inspector," he said, and they both sipped the excellent wine.

Littlejohn looked around him. Shelves crammed to overflowing with books. Ancient histories mostly, by the look of them, but one bookcase contained something more modern. The Inspector's eyes opened wide at the sight.

Maigret, Lord Peter, Fortune and Clunk, Bobbie Owen, Nero Wolfe, Ellery Queen and all the rest of them along with Holmes, Lecoq, Dupin and Rouletabille ... Voltaire's *Zadig*, too, as a classical touch.

"Yes, Inspector, I'm fond of detectives. But this is the first time I've ever shared in a case."

"Well, sir, I must say I'm a bit surprised. I thought you dons had no time for the likes of us...."

"Come, come, Inspector. I like a good murder. And I like a clever solution better. I don't want you to think me melodramatic, but I have something to tell you in strictest confidence and one can't be too careful. I'm nearly seventy, but I've still my wits about me and although its disloyal, I must say that Chalmers has been so long in the clouds of higher mathematics that he's lost touch with earthly realities. Do you read German, Inspector?"

"No, I'm sorry to say, sir ... French, a little, but no German."

"Never mind, I'll translate for you."

Scrope was no longer the timid little don. He was very alert, excited and voluble. As he chattered, he searched in a drawer of his desk. Papers fell out higgledy-piggledy about the floor. At length he swooped on a bundle of papers clipped together and brought it to his guest.

“Here we are, Inspector. Verbatim report of a lecture delivered by Dr. Braun at Jena in the summer of 1936....”

Scrope turned over the pages nervously, seeking his place, prattling the while.

“My nephew took down this lecture as delivered. He was over there on a course.... A young fellow, brilliant surgeon, now with the R.A.F. One day, with time on his hands, he heard of a lecture on the Herrenvolk ... yes, Herrenvolk, being given to German students by a visiting professor from Austria. It was Braun. Now there’s nothing wrong with the Herrenvolk idea, provided you don’t try to keep it exclusively to one nation, especially Germany.... But listen yourself. Here’s the passage I want you to mark. I can’t give you the manuscript. It isn’t mine to give. But here’s a sheet of paper. You can copy the passage as I read it. It’s only quite short.”

Scrope drank off his sherry, found a sheet of foolscap which he passed to Littlejohn, and began to read. His translation might have been ready written for him, so well and briskly did he do it, pausing now and then to enable Littlejohn to write it down.

“.... ‘it is my firm conviction that in those days before history, and concerning which my poor scraps of evidence dug from the German earth throw a little light, a branch broke from the main trunk of human progress which far exceeded the rest in vigorous growth and manifestation. The best that was in the tree, the sap giving life, intelligence, energy, poured into it; the rest of the branches were far behind. The master-branch spread and flourished.

“‘To change the metaphor, ladies and gentlemen. The master race, the Herrenvolk, had issued from the stream. Other races were left behind. They could serve the master race, assist it in its ultimate purpose of perfection, but never outstrip it again. This law was ordained far back in man’s beginning. Weaker races were subdued. Mightier and mightier grew the Herrenvolk. History tells it; research such as mine proves it. The master race—the Herrenvolk—are the Germans!’”

“Well, Inspector? What do you think of it? Does that bear out poor old deluded Chalmers’ opinion? Of course it doesn’t. But Chalmers and a lot like him never saw that lecture in print. It was never printed, in fact. It was suppressed. Not because the Nazis didn’t want it blasting by trumpets all

over the world, but because it didn't suit them at the time to show their hand."

"But why did nobody hear of it, sir, until now?"

"My nephew happened to be there by sheer chance. He sneaked into the lecture-room among a lot of young Nazis and left before the end. Otherwise, I'm afraid his notes would have been confiscated."

"And why didn't you raise the point before, sir?"

"And be laughed out of court by my colleagues here? After all, who's to know that my nephew didn't make this up? Not deliberately, of course, but in taking it down wrongly, or something. At the time Chalmers and the others were testifying on behalf of Braun, I didn't see much point in butting-in. But now, there's a war going on. And we're fighting for our lives against these damned Herrenvolk of Braun's. The iron's hot, I think. It's up to you to strike, Inspector."

Scrope's face suddenly assumed a puzzled look.

"But here I am talking all this and I don't even know if you're after Braun for anything...."

"You needn't worry, sir. We're after him all right. Your evidence just about crowns the job. I can't tell you more just now, but I'm eternally grateful to you, sir, for a very timely bit of help. I promise you when the birds are in the net, you shall know everything. Then you'll see what a large slice of the jigsaw you've provided."

"Good. Good. Another glass of sherry, Inspector. Here's good luck to you. And to hell with the Herrenvolk!"

That night the detectives met again at tea. Cromwell had been round the village gathering routine confirmation of Roger Harwood's story from several hitherto antagonistic natives, who thawed on being told that the family had nothing to do with the tragic part of recent happenings. Some seemed so relieved that they wasted a lot of Cromwell's time in irrelevant reminiscences about the escapades of Roger's childhood. Another personage who was pleased with developments was P.C. Bowells, the village constable, who hitherto had been torn between duty and local popularity. After dark, he went to the Harwood Arms on pretended official business, and there, under the influence of the restored spirit of good will about the place, was induced to participate in a game of darts, the results of

which made history and brought the light-hearted Bowells as near as dammit to intoxication on the beer that was bought for him.

“German spies?” Cromwell was saying to Littlejohn.

“Looks like something of the sort. I began to smell a rat when the ghost story collapsed. Someone wanted this place kept very select. So much so, that they hired a room under a faked name to keep out intruders, tried to scare off others by poppycock about haunting, even put up a phony poltergeist. Braun’s probably a Nazi agent. He got out of Germany with cash in bearer bonds to finance his activities. Funny they let him out with so much if he was a genuine refugee.

“Carberry-Peacocke’s son’s a fascist and they’re mad because he’s interned. C.-P. used to be an expert on wireless-receiving stations. Miss Pott the younger’s said to be having an affair with Williatt, who’s away in London, though under the eye of our chaps there. How are they all connected?”

“Search me, chief.”

“.... And the Hartwrights are just bags of mystery. Nothing for and nothing against them.”

“Maybe they’re spies, too.”

“We’ve plenty to do to-morrow, Cromwell. We’ve to see the Misses Pott. We must find out what Braun and his disciples are really at. And whilst the Professor’s out, we’d better search his flat. We’ve lain low long enough. We’ve got to make a bold move. And lastly, we’d better advise Special Branch that we think we’ve struck a nest of spies. We’ll not do much talking over the ’phone. Just ring the Sussex Police and ask for Heathcote to come down here with an assistant first thing in the morning. Every one of the parties in this outfit must be watched in future.”

Cromwell took up the ’phone and did as he was ordered. From Heathcote came an enthusiastic promise to cooperate and be on the spot as desired.

“Before we retire, we’d better tell the local constable to be here early, too. Maybe he knows where Braun’s supposed to be digging—or whatever he does with that convoy of his—and can keep an eye on him and his pupils for us.”

Cromwell dialled the police-station, Harwood, and was very huskily assured that the constable would report for orders at eight the following morning. The conversation ended in a very loud hiccup from the other end,

but Cromwell could not tell exactly whether or not it was a defect in the instrument, a pistol shot, or a rude noise made with the tongue and lips to signify disrespectful dismissal and called after a summer fruit.

DISASTER AT DEVIL'S DYKE

IT was late at night when the detectives finished comparing notes. The whole place was quiet. It was like the calm before the storm, for neither of the two men knew where the information they had gathered was going to lead them, or when the whole case was going to burst open with startling results.

"Now for the Misses Pott," said Littlejohn to Cromwell. "It's high time we had it out with that strange pair."

Cromwell looked bothered.

"It's going to be a tough nut to crack, sir. Miss Agnes is as deaf as a post and can't lip-read. She's completely under the domination of her sister and I wouldn't be surprised if Edith hadn't kept her deaf to further her own ends. I mean, most deaf folk can get relief in one way or another. Lip-reading or the hundred and one appliances you see advertised. The poor old girl must be almost a half-wit. Doesn't seem able to do a thing for herself. And if we're going to conduct a confidential interview by bawling it from the housetops or writing questions and answers, we're going to have a picnic."

"That's up to you, Cromwell. I'm tackling the younger one first thing in the morning. She usually goes down before her sister to get out the car. On my way in, I disconnected a part of the ignition, which will take long enough to find to allow me to get there and have a few quiet words with her before Agnes joins her. That will be your cue, too, Cromwell."

Cromwell groaned and then his face lightened.

"I think I can manage it," he said, and picking up the telephone he began a long conversation with someone at Scotland Yard.

"Yes ..." he ended up, "make a neat parcel of it and hand it to the guard of the 7.4 out from Victoria. I'll pick it up at Meadford station."

"Ingenious!" chuckled Littlejohn.

The Inspector was fast asleep long before Cromwell had finished his solemn ritual of deep breathing, teeth-cleaning, gargling and joint-flexing.

In the dark the ambitious detective-sergeant held converse with his subconscious. “Every day and in every way I get better and better,” until his monotonous chant changed to regular snores.

After breakfast the detectives began their vigil, waiting for a move from the flat next door. First, Dr. Braun and his assistants stumped-off on their digging expedition. These were left to P.C. Bowells, who had already received his instructions. Finally, there was the sound of a nearby door opening and closing. Edith Pott’s brogues could be heard, their decisive tread barely muffled by the carpet.

Littlejohn turned-out and casually followed her to the garage. Cromwell was next and knocked on the door of the adjacent quarters, where he waited politely until he suddenly realised that the occupant couldn’t hear. He then slowly opened the door, inches at a time, the only way he could think of warning the elder Miss Pott that he was there.

Agnes Pott was putting on a freakish hat before a wall mirror in the dining-room. She hadn’t heard Cromwell coming and almost jumped out of her skin when she saw him.

“Oh ...” she squeaked.

Cromwell made overtures of appeasement in pantomime, like a castaway approaching a native on an uncharted island. Spotting a pad on the table, he made haste to write a message, behaving rather like a dog humbling himself before one of his kind of whose reactions he is uncertain.

He wrote:

“May I have a few words with you about Mr. Burt?” She scribbled an answer in spiky writing:

“I don’t know anything. I cannot hear what goes on. My sister is waiting for me with the car and I have not much time.” The pencil changed hands again.

“My colleague is interviewing your sister. I’d greatly value your help, too.” Another change of the pad.

“I am deaf. What use am I?”

Cromwell pointed to the small parcel he was carrying. It was a gesture like that of a smiling conjuror pulling rabbits out of a hat.

He undid the string and sorted out the contents.

A small microphone, a battery, some wire and a neat appliance for fitting in the ear of the deaf.

Miss Pott's eyes opened wide. Like two small saucers. She groped for the scribbling-block.

Cromwell was first with the pencil.

"An aid to hearing for the deaf. Try it please." The reply came with speed:

"They are useless for my complaint. My sister has tried them on me. NO USE." Cromwell insisted:

"Try this."

Reluctantly and with a show of fussy resignation, Agnes Pott slipped the earpiece in its place. Cromwell inserted the battery and pressed a small switch.

"Can you hear me?" he said in a normally pitched tone.

The change in Miss Pott was pathetic. At first, Cromwell thought she was going to fall unconscious. Then, her eyes grew bright with wonder. The lines of strain seemed to melt from her face, which glowed with a sort of exultation.

"But ... but all the others were so useless," she muttered.

Probably suited your sister to miss fixing them properly, thought Cromwell, but he didn't express his feelings.

"First, let me hear the birds ... let me hear the birds. It's more than twenty years since I heard the birds."

The poor woman rushed to the window, flung the casement wide and surrendered herself to listening to the only bird song available at the time, the twitter of house sparrows and the chatter of alarmed blackbirds, with a background of cackling from Mrs. Stone's hens and the gobbling of some turkeys being fattened for Christmas by the Harwood Pig and Poultry Club.

Cromwell's customary sanguine nature rose in momentary rage. He could willingly have strangled the sister who had for so long and so wilfully deprived this woman of all the joys of pleasant sounds. Even the rattle of Mrs. Stone's pig-swill buckets and the hideous squealing of the occupants of the sties were music to Miss Agnes Pott.

"I must tell Edith at once. May I buy this from you?"

"We'll talk about that later, Miss Pott. But I just want a word or two with you before you go."

"Hurry then, Mr... Mr..."

"Cromwell, madam. Sergeant Cromwell."

"The police?"

"Yes."

"What use am I to you, sergeant? But don't think I'm ungrateful. I'm delighted and very much beholden to you ... for introducing this instrument to me, I mean."

"Well, a few routine questions then, that's all. Perhaps you'll find them a bit unpleasant..."

"I'll do my best to answer them, though."

"Are you blood-sister to Miss Edith?"

"No. In fact, we're not kin at all, except by adoption. My father married twice. Edith was a small child when she and her mother came to live with us. She took our name."

"I see. Now please don't think me inquisitive. Necessary duty, you know. Do you mind telling me how you manage to afford a flat like this?"

"We have private means which Edith makes up by journalism."

"What kind of writing?"

"I don't know. My deafness is such a handicap. I can't even hear when she's typing. I go to bed early and she does it after I've gone. She seems to work better alone. But I'll be able to help her more now, won't I?"

I wonder, thought Cromwell.

"How did you find this flat, Miss?"

"A friend of Edith's told her about it. The rent was far too high for us, but she had a windfall. Regular work on a ladies' paper—at home, too. So she said we could manage. Edith was a bit tired of our old place at St. John's Wood."

"You know Mr. Williatt opposite?"

“Oh, yes. He’s away in London for a few days, isn’t he?”

“Known him long?”

“Only since I came here. Edith knew him in London before, though. She met him through her literary work.”

“Are they in love?”

Miss Pott gave Cromwell a funny look.

“What makes you ask that?”

“I’ve heard they are.”

Miss Pott grew grave and quiet.

“Now, I have.... But no! It’s impossible....”

She brushed the matter aside.

Cromwell thought it best to change the subject for the time being. No use antagonising the woman.

“What do you and your sister do with your time, Miss Pott? During the day, I mean.”

“Edith’s fond of motoring. I love the country and scenery. It’s *seeing* that I depend on for my happiness. Now, I’ll be able to hear as well.”

“Where do you go in the car?”

“We often take the road to Brighton and turn off at Devil’s Dyke. Or, we may go to Steyning and Wiston and climb to Chanctonbury Ring, although that’s a hard pull. We’ve been to Redhill Common, too. And when we get there, we picnic for the whole day and rest. Edith takes her field-glasses and gets views from Devil’s Dyke and Chanctonbury. The wide sweep of Downs, you know, with villages dotted about and the skies full of heavenly clouds. She takes notes on it all. She’s writing a book, you see.”

“Ever seen her notes?”

“Why, no. What a strange question, sergeant. She always locks them in her desk. Now, we’ll be able to talk them over together. Thank you again, Mr. Cromwell.”

Cromwell almost blushed at his own duplicity. But in his mind’s eye he saw the south country from the tops of the Downs. A network of roads, strategic roads, with troops moving along them. West to East. To the channel ports and camps dotted along the valleys. Troop dispositions! Field-glasses on hill-tops! Notes!

“But we must be off. I must show Edith my apparatus if you’ll lend it to me. Or, perhaps she won’t like it....”

Agnes seemed bewildered by puzzling thoughts and torn between joy and sorrow.

“I must tell her when we’re on the way.... Break it gently.”

Whereat she offered Cromwell her hand and ushered him out.

Littlejohn had apparently finished with Miss Edith. Her car seemed put to rights, too, for the shiny bull-nose emerged and drew up at the front door. The two sisters were soon on their way.

Cromwell told Littlejohn what had transpired.

“Good Lord!” said the Inspector. “Don’t you see, man, if Agnes tackles Edith and starts quizzing her, there’ll be trouble. Especially if she discloses that you’ve questioned her and she’s spilled the beans about the watching from high spots on the hills. They may bolt and we may never see them again, or have the devil’s own job catching them, if they’re up to anything fishy....”

“I’m sure Agnes is quite straight and above board, chief. Edith might be up to something and using Agnes as a stalking-horse. The old dear’s a model of respectability and a sort of walking testimonial for her associates, I think. A good mask for a clandestine affair with Williatt, or even worse, a bit of spying for the enemy. Did you get much out of Edith?”

“No. But we’ll leave that for the moment. You’d better be off after them and don’t let ’em out of your sight. That is, if you can pick them up after all the time we’ve wasted talking about them. They’ve gone to Devil’s Dyke again.”

“What can we do, though? There aren’t any cars available here, are there?”

“No. Better borrow the landlord’s motor-bike from the Harwood Arms.”

“Motor-bike? But I’m not dressed for that ... no cap or anything. Can’t we scrounge a car from somewhere?”

“There’s no car available for miles, I tell you. You can drive a bike, can’t you? Now get along with you.”

Cromwell made off with a good grace and whilst he pursued his quarry in his bowler hat, Littlejohn searched Edith Pott’s desk for notes of her “novel.”

The little Morris hummed its way merrily along the Brighton road. Both occupants were silent, as was their custom. No use trying to hold a

conversation with a deaf woman above the noise of an engine travelling at fifty miles an hour.

The elder of the two had not yet disclosed the new contraption that she had come-by. It hung on her breast beneath her tweed motoring coat. She seemed deep in anxious thought and was turning-over in her mind some of the implications arising from her talk with the police officer.

Cowfold, Henfield, Muddleswood.

The car stoutly breasted the rise of the South Downs.

Poynings, Fulking.

The great mass of Devil's Dyke lay ahead of them. The topmost point was not accessible to cars and it was their custom to leave the Morris parked at the nearest available spot and complete the way on foot.

At the steepest point of the gradient Miss Agnes fitted and snapped-on her new apparatus.

"Edith," she said suddenly. "What exactly are we going to Devil's Dyke for?"

Seeing her sister turn in astonishment, she pointed to the small receiver of the instrument. Edith's mouth opened. Her interest was suddenly divided between driving and this startling revelation.

"Where did you get that thing?"

"Why have you always told me these appliances were no good? Have you been purposely deceiving me, Edith? ... For your own ends. Have you deliberately planned to keep me deaf? For what reason? ..."

Agnes was so unused to beginning a conversation that the full content of her present thoughts seemed to gush out in a string of dangerous questions.

"... What have I done to you, Edith, to deserve this?"

The car swerved dangerously. Edith Pott's face turned brick-red.

"Don't talk like a fool, Agnes," was all she could think of by way of an answer.

The elder woman's microphone was not up to selecting this from the tumult of the engine and the rush of the air and transmitting it correctly.

"The detective who came to see me just before we left, said he'd heard there was something between you and Mr. Williatt, too. Isn't Mr. Williatt married, Edith? Now that I can hear, I shall be in the dark no longer and I insist that you tell me everything and assure me that nothing is wrong...."

Agnes prattled on, as yet unused to the prudence of choosing her words.

Edith continued to drive on, the accelerator flat-out. She was wondering what to do. They climbed to the steepest part of the road, but instead of stopping, as usual, the driver continued. She did not even brake and the car gathered speed.

The elder Miss Pott seemed too occupied with the business in hand to notice the furious, mounting pace at which they were travelling.

“As for these trips to the Downs and the notes you make, Edith.... You must tell me of them, too. I shall be able to help. I CAN HEAR NOW.”

Agnes shouted it above the roar of the careering vehicle.

Edith knew that the secret was one which Agnes's integrity would not countenance. Her rage knew no bounds. Her eyes turned to the small contrivance which Agnes wore proudly, like a medal for valour, on her jumper. Then she saw red! She snatched at it with one hand, whilst trying to steer with the other.

“What are you doing?” screamed the astonished wearer above the din and she instinctively seized Edith's arm in both her hands.

The wheel turned, the car swerved. Both women were tossed apart. Only then did they seem to realise the speed at which they were moving. The younger tried desperately to put things right, braking with both hand and foot. The car left the road under the strain, bounded down the incline, seemed to bounce, topple and struggle like a live thing to keep four-square on its wheels. Then, it struck a solitary sycamore tree just where the ground levelled out a bit. There was a jolt and a scream. The little Morris crumpled and bent as though a giant hand were squeezing it.

Over the hill appeared an uncomfortable rider on a motor-cycle, a billycock pressed down over his ears. At the sight of the accident he pulled-up with a jerk, parked the machine by the roadside and tore down the slope.

Both sisters were dead when Cromwell reached the car. Reverently he wrestled to remove his bowler hat and bared his head for Agnes.

“This saves you a lot of pain and trouble, Miss Agnes,” he muttered and looked sadly at the precious hearing-box which she was clutching to her even in death.

Cromwell sighed, hurried uphill to his bike, and roared off to get help.

CATCH-AS-CATCH-CAN

POLICE Constable Joseph Bowells looked rather sheepishly at his wife as he entered for breakfast early on the morning after the phenomenal darts match.

“Did I get a ’phone call last night to report early at the ’all, Gwen, or did I dream it?” he said, trying to pass off the matter with heavy jocularitas and not succeeding.

“Of course you did. I mean, you’re to report at the Hall,” replied Mrs. Bowells. She was a bright little round-faced woman with fluffy greying hair.

“Better ’urry up and be off, then. Wonder what they’re wantin’.”

The village policeman was tall and heavy, with a ruddy, shining, clean-shaven face. Very popular in his own territory, too. There was little crime in Harwood. A few poachers, with now and then some chap or other getting a bit above himself in drink and beating-up his wife. But Bowells did good work. It was a comfort to know that he was there in case of need, solid, good-natured, reliable and full of sound advice.

His chief defect was his name, which caused some vulgar mirth when he first arrived in those parts from his native Essex. His own father had been very sensitive about it after an incident in which counsel for the defendants in a poaching case had made great fun of the name. In fact, after that event, Bowells *père*, like Tom Hood’s Mr. Hogsflesh, had been quite put out of countenance unless addressed by his initial, as mere Mr. B. But P.C. Bowells didn’t care a hoot about it. Nor did his wife. He even knew that it had once been Le Bow, and wondered who’d had the grim humour to change it.

So P.C. Bowells, wearing his flat cap, for he’d ridden to the Hall on his bike, presented himself deferentially before Littlejohn for his instructions.

“Do you know anything about Dr. Braun who’s living in these flats?” asked the Inspector after the formalities of getting acquainted had been

completed.

“Beg pardon, sir?”

“Dr. Braun ... B-R-A-U-N....”

“Oh, BRAUN.... Well, sir, I know a bit about 'im. You see, I'm in a way responsible for keepin' an eye on him. He's registerable under the regulations as a friendly alien.”

“That's it, Bowells. Well, do you ever come across him on your rounds?”

“Now and then, sir. He goes off diggin' with that there van of his and his two assistants.”

“Know anything about the two young men?”

“Very little, sir. Both British, they are. They're living down at the Arms, sir, and the landlord says they pay promptly and are well-behaved. Keep themselves to themselves, too. No drinkin' with the public or such. Wrapped up in their work, they seem to be.”

“H'm. And what do they do with the van?”

“Well, they've permission to dig in certain of these parts. There are ancient burying-places hereabouts, you know, which it's forbidden to disturb except with permission. They've got that all right and go working 'ere and there at it. I've been there when they've dug-up bones and pots and what looked like weapons o' sorts. They pack the lot, earth and all, in those packin' cases you always see them with, and carry it back to the 'all for storage and closer examination. Seem to get on all right with the farmers whose land they dig-up, too. Pay well for it, I'm told.”

“You've spoken to them?”

“Oh, yes. Civil enough they are. Showed me letters and paper givin' 'em permission, and when I reported it to headquarters, I was told to give 'em every facility within the limits of their permits, like.”

“What do you think of Braun?”

“Not much. Surly sort of chap. Lost in his own affairs; all intent on what he's doing. Leaves everything to the young chaps in the way of explanations and gets impatient if anybody stays around for long. Perhaps thinks they might pinch his old bones.”

“Well, Bowells, I want you to keep an eye on their activities for a day or two. In strictest confidence, we're losing our trust in Dr. Braun. That's all I can say for the moment about it, but I want you to keep him and his party under observation.”

So ... thought Bowells, and not before it's time. He didn't approve of Germans in any shape or form, especially impudent ones, and he classed Dr. Braun among the latter.

"Where are they working at the moment? Do you know, Bowells?"

"Yes, sir. I saw 'em at it yesterday by Plumpton's Farm. What they're doing there, I don't know. I never heard about any old burial-grounds thereabouts. They were diggin' a hole in a field near the railway. Busy as bees, they were."

"Where is this farm?"

"Fields run up to the railway-line between Meadford and South Gorsley on the main London line."

"Well, just watch them for a day or two and report to me, Bowells, if there's anything unusual happening."

"Very good, sir."

"They've not left yet, but I can hear them stirring above, so you'd better be off and get there before them. Don't let them know you're watching them, of course."

"Trust me, sir."

P.C. Bowells was in his element. He was a patriot to his very marrow and of late he had been depressed. His two sons were in the forces. His wife had taken in two evacuees. She was president of the Women's Institute and, as such, made large quantities of jams and socks. The constable himself did a lot of extra duties in connection with A.R.P. and tightened patrols, to say nothing of extending his kitchen garden by a hundred per cent or more. Yet, he felt he wasn't doing enough. He wanted to run-in everyone who wasted petrol or held dinner parties until the small hours of the morning, but unluckily, the local upstart gentry were the offenders and some of them were even J.P.s. And then there were those he knew quite well who were hoarding food or frequenting black markets. But he couldn't make a proper case of it without unlawfully entering their premises....

But this ... a sort of spying on spies and perhaps saboteurs ... was just his meat! Metaphorically, P.C. Bowells spat on his hands.

First of all, the constable thought it best to have a word with Ward, the tenant of Plumpton's. Ward was a decent, civil fellow and was quite open about it all.

"The foreign chap, Brawn...."

“Braun,” corrected Bowells.

“Braun, then, came here one day last week and asked if he could do a bit o’ diggin’ in the field next to the railway embankment. He said, according to some old maps he’d dug out, he believed there was once an old barrow there. I was a bit puzzled, like, wonderin’ what he’d be wanting with old barrows, until he said he meant a sort of mound where ancient people had been buried.”

“A mound?” said Bowells. “Why, the place is marshy and flat, isn’t it? If I recollect right, there’s a culvert runs out of that field with drainage water, isn’t there?”

“That’s right, Joe. I said the same to Brawn. ‘You must ’a made a mistake,’ I sez. ‘There’s never been any mound there. Why, the field was a marsh until we put in the culvert to take the water off and under the line of the river.’ ‘That’s as may be,’ sez his nibs. ‘I’m speakin’ o’ hundreds, nay thousands o’ years since.’ And he begins to get impatient, like.”

“That’s him. One would think he owned the country instead of being a refugee. However, go on, Fred.”

“I was just gettin’ my rag out, too. Felt the blood of temper risin’, I did. When he suddenly calms down and offers me ten pounds for the privilege of digging there, he calls it. Well, Joe. I ask you. Ten pounds. Money for jam, wasn’t it? The field’s good for nothin’ ... a bit of pasture and then, damn all else. The part he wanted to dig in is just overgrown with rushes. I jumped at the offer.”

“I don’t blame you, Fred.”

“And since then ... well, for two days, the day before yesterday and yesterday, they’ve just been diggin’ a hole among the rushes. I’ve left ’em to their own devices. I’ve got my ten-pound note, Joe, and provided they leave the place straight as promised, I’ve nothin’ to complain of.”

“Quite right, too, Fred. But I’m just goin’ to keep an eye on them protem, Fred. Nothin’ very official, you know....”

“Why, what they been up to? Hope I’m not bein’ mixed-up in any jiggery-pokery, Joe. Because if I am, off they go, ten pounds or no ten pounds....”

“Don’t you worry, Fred. I have my doubts as to whether they’re allowed permission to dig up burial grounds, if such they be, which I doubt, without proper permission from Somerset House,” lied P.C. Bowells valiantly and

ignorantly in a good cause. "So I'll jest hang around a bit. But don't you on any account mention it to Brawn.... Braun, I mean."

"As if I would, Joe ...! You know me better nor that."

By the time the savant, his followers, their van and the packing-cases arrived, the constable was hidden in a derelict cart, which had been left to rot within fifty yards of the very spot where the men were digging. Braun and his retinue did not waste much time. They looked well around them, seemed satisfied that they weren't observed, and got to business.

The motor-van had been drawn up as near to the scene of operations as the peaty soil would permit. The men brought down the packing-cases from inside and carried them to the edge of the pit they had dug. They fished in the cases and brought out overalls which they donned. Then Braun and one of them started to grub about in the hole, apparently hunting bones and the like. At least, that is what they seemed to be doing from Bowells' improvised gazebo.

The other man, however, busied himself coming and going to and from the nearby drainage conduit which ran under the railway line. He was very casual about it and didn't stay there for long at each trip. He carried several things with him, cautiously. To the watcher they looked like pieces of bone which he seemed to be hiding.

"Maybe they're finding something they shouldn't there, and hidin' it away," said Bowells to himself. "I'll take a look-see when they've gone."

But Bowells was unlucky.

The cart in which he had concealed himself was not up to the strain of bearing the constable's weight indefinitely, especially when he writhed into new positions to ease the ache in his cramped limbs. After a creaking protest or two, the rotten bottom of the contrivance fell out, revealing a pair of blue, bicycle-clipped trousers for all to see.

The men at the hole looked up at the noise of scuffling and rending, and Braun, with a startled exclamation, hurried to the scene of the collapse.

Bowells found himself staring down the barrel of a nasty-looking automatic.

"'ere. Just you put that down, Mr. Brawn, and explain yourself," said the constable calmly. The fellow might be armed, but no Hun was going to scare Joe Bowells.

The two assistants ran to the scene.

“I wouldn’t, if I were you, Dr. Braun. This will only cause complications....”

“Not if I shoot him, as I surely will if he moves further.”

The bobby knew from the look in his eye that Braun meant it, too, so he resigned himself to what was next on the programme.

“Tie him up,” said Braun. “A good thing for you, my friend, our work ends here to-day. Otherwise ...”

P.C. Bowells didn’t even flinch. It reminded him of the pictures.

The two young men set about their task with obvious distaste. They were English, or pretended to be, and instinctively rebelled against even handling a man in blue.

Trussed-up, ankles, hands, arms, legs, and a clean pocket handkerchief stuffed in his mouth, P.C. Bowells was hoisted back into what remained of the wreck of the cart and left to his own thoughts, whilst his antagonists returned to their labours.

Trains came and went on the line. The constable guessed the time by the passing of a Pullman, which he could see through a chink in the wood. Only ten o’clock! How much longer ... and what then?

Suddenly, through one of the rotten boards of the old vehicle Bowells noticed a piece of sheet-tin. It was rusty, but still on its outside bore the dim inscription, “F. Ward, Farmer, Plumpton’s Meadford.” It was screwed on the side of the cart.

Gently Bowells eased himself nearer to the plate. Turning his back to it, he maneuvered his wrists in the direction of it. The crack in the wood through which it showed was far too small to permit his passing his hands through, but the timber was rotten and might break away.

Train followed train on the embankment and still Bowells writhed and snorted and struggled. He often took his wife to the pictures, but never imagined anything of this sort happening to *him*! Bit by bit, he clawed away the rotten wood with his nails. It hurt him like hell. At length he was able to squeeze his hands through. When he told the tale afterwards, P.C. Bowells wasn’t ashamed to say that he said his prayers many times over. He was afraid the tin plaque would break from its moorings and fall to the ground as soon as he laid the weight of his tied wrists on it. However, it didn’t. By 11.30 he was free, for as soon as he recovered the use of his hands, he

hauled out a great clasp-knife from beneath his tunic and hacked the rest of his bonds away.

It all had to be done gingerly, too, lest the men so busy at the hole and the culvert be alarmed. And there was blood over everything, because Bowells couldn't keep his flesh free from the tin as he wore away the rope. He deserved the recognition he afterwards received for his share in the affair. Sergeant Bowells....

The next item on the agenda was as ticklish as the first, for the constable had now to worm himself from the rickety cart and edge his way across the field for help without disturbing the diggers. He managed to do it, in spite of his bulk. A man of great patience, Bowells. Inch by inch. The long rushes assisted him, too. He chose his time, when the two in the hole were immersed and the other fellow was in the culvert. Flat-out among the rushes crawled Joe Bowells. Like an eel to the ditch, and then it was easy. He was a mile from the farm and was afraid that if they discovered he was missing, his quarry would bolt. But, as he emerged from the ditch under cover of a thorn hedge, he saw two Canadian soldiers sitting smoking on a gate. They had been trying a short cut to Meadford station and had lost their way.

P.C. Bowells spoke first.

"In the name of the law!" he said, and told them at once what he wanted. He was covered in mud and blood, but he impressed the two soldiers.

They looked at each other.

"What did we come over here for?" asked one.

"Sure," replied his pal, and then and there they joined the constable's posse.

Bowells now knew the lie of the land thoroughly and led his forces skilfully. They were on Braun and his troop before the enemy knew what had got them.

Braun's assistants were no chickens. In fact, they looked liked Rugby heavyweights. At the sight of them, the two Canadians silently spat on their hands.

On the way, Bowells picked up a round stone the size of a cricket ball. In the good old days, the bobby had been Harwood's best slow bowler. He said his prayers again as he arranged his fingers cunningly round the smooth sides of his missile.

Luckily, the two assistants were not armed. The constable's force burst whooping upon them from thirty yards, running pell-mell. Braun drew his automatic as soon as he had recovered from the shock. Bowells sent him a body-line ball which took him full in the solar plexus. Before the fellow could recover his poise the bobby was on him, had him by the scruff of the neck, shook him like a rat, and then snapped on the handcuffs.

The rest of the catch-as-catch-can didn't last long. The Canadians had been spoiling for a fight. After the first blow from one of them, his opponent seemed to sail into the air, hit the earth with a thud and continued to lie still in spite of the soldier's eloquent persuasions. As for the other would-be anthropologist, he showed fight and science. He smote his opponent a mighty blow which made him reel back, and followed it up with another, which, however, was successfully parried. The Canadian smiled grimly. Nobody saw what happened next, but the last of the Braunians measured his length and lay still. They hauled them off to Ward's place, whence Bowells telephoned to Littlejohn.

"You shall pay for this outrage ... *Himmel!* ... I will have the law.... You have no cause ..." yelled Braun, now beside himself, and his scholarly reserve quite broken down.

"We'll call it h'obstructing the police in the discharge of their duties to begin with," replied Bowells, who with his two assistants was taking liquid refreshment, after securely trussing his prisoners pending the arrival of the milk van which was to serve as Black Maria.

"Say, officer," said one of the Canadians, "that was a durned good effort with the stone against the feller with the gun...."

"Constable Bowells is the best bowler in these parts," replied Ward proudly.

"Baseball?" asked the other Canadian, grinning over his mug.

"Nooooo ..." answered the farmer with disgust. "Cricket!"

DOMESTIC INTERLUDE

WHILST the rest of his colleagues went their various ways about the countryside, Littlejohn stayed at home in Harwood Hall.

Heathcote, of the Sussex Police, came and went off again with a promise to communicate at once with Special Branch at Scotland Yard concerning Littlejohn's suspicions of spying activities. Another plainclothes man, who arrived with Heathcote, was posted in the grounds with instructions to keep an eye on the movement of the Hartwrights and the Carberry-Peacockes, who, so far, didn't seem to have made a move.

The whole place grew very quiet. Littlejohn rang over on the house-telephone and told Stone to come to the Hall at once. As he waited for the janitor he saw through the window two women arriving from the village to clean some of the flats. Agg, the Cockney, was still about the grounds and at the time was smoothing the gravel of the main drive.

Downstairs, Mrs. Hartwright and Mrs. Carberry-Peacocke could be heard beginning a conversation, the latter's voice raised querulously.

"I've not been used to housework.... Since the maid gave notice and went, it's been a nightmare. And Mrs. Stone won't help. She's got enough to do, she says...."

The telephone bell of Littlejohn's quarters rang shrilly.

It was Mrs. Littlejohn calling from their Hampstead home. She asked her husband if he'd settled down for life at Harwood.

"I'm ringing to tell you that Luc's been here...."

"Who?"

"Inspector Luc...."

"Oh, Luc...."

"That's what I said. He's in London on business and paid a friendly call. I told him where you were and he says you're right on his beat. He'll probably pop in to see you on his way back. I showed him the spot on your big map."

Littlejohn, in the course of his duties, had visited the Sûreté in Paris several times. His French was good, thanks to his wife's efforts and the fact that his neighbours in Hampstead were French people with whom the Littlejohns played bridge quite often.

The Scotland Yard man's counterpart in the Police Judiciare was Inspector François-Xavier Luc, and extradition, records and conference work had made them good friends. Littlejohn had even stayed with the Lues at their home in Passy. He looked forward to meeting the Frenchman again, especially in existing circumstances, when the war prevented many of the former cross-Channel comings and goings.

After hanging-up the telephone, Littlejohn lit his pipe and stood staring through the window with unseeing eyes. He was mentally uneasy. Somewhere in his sub-conscious an idea struggled to make itself manifest. The Inspector was familiar with this mental state of affairs. It was the herald of illumination, as a rule, and followed a period of gathering information, soaking-in atmosphere, and often pursuing a blind course. No use hurrying the process. Incubation must be complete. Meanwhile, with it almost established that Harwood was a nest of spies, what other revelation could be knocking at the door?

Stone arrived and Littlejohn borrowed his pass-key. Then he dismissed the lodge-keeper. He wanted to investigate the flats of the mysterious tenants alone.

A modern oak bureau, such as could be bought any day in Tottenham Court Road, stood in one corner of the Potts' dining-room and Littlejohn made for this as soon as he entered the flat. The drawers were all locked, but presented no difficulties.

From the point of view of disclosing espionage activities, the search was most disappointing. The desk revealed nothing whatever in that line. In a writing-case, however, were letters from Williatt which left no doubt concerning his relations with the younger sister. Furthermore, the fellow had begun enthusiastically, and cooled-off. That was apparent.

There was a passbook, too, from a bank in Mayfair, showing a good credit balance with substantial items in cash feeding it from time to time.

Littlejohn went through the flat in expert fashion. He even set about the books in the small bookcase and was in the midst of them when he heard

the telephone again ringing in his own rooms. Hastily he set the books in order again and hurried out.

It was Cromwell announcing the disaster at Devil's Dyke and the deaths of both sisters.

The Inspector felt a bit reluctant to resume his search of the next-door flat now that the tenants were dead. He returned to his task, however, with the thought that if he did not finish it at once, he might never have a real chance again. He met with disappointment, for his renewed efforts yielded nothing whatever, except a book or two on psychic research. In one of these the pages covering poltergeists were well-thumbed, as though the owner had been studying technique.

The rooms occupied by Braun, to which Littlejohn next turned his attention, were equally barren in useful information of the kind he was seeking. They were very plainly furnished.

A bed, a dressing-table and a chest of drawers in the bedroom, with two collapsed camp-beds for the hirelings when they stayed the night. The other furnished room held a dining-table and three dining-chairs, a desk and three cheap easy chairs.

The remaining two rooms of the suite were used for storage. Several packing-cases holding the meagre fruits of Braun's digging and hunting. Brown bones, corroded ornaments and weapons, bits of broken pottery.

The main contents of the kitchen were tinned goods.

Littlejohn went carefully over the whole of the flat. No papers anywhere, except a batch of what seemed to be inventories of anthropological objects found in the district with a list of other sites for excavation. The Inspector guessed that there might be in these documents more than met the eye. The Special Branch man could look them over when he arrived. He was better equipped for such a job.

Nothing of further interest came to light and Littlejohn returned to his room rather chagrined. Both his searches had revealed little to connect the parties with a well-planned scheme of espionage. Yet, somewhere in the building there must be evidence for or against his theory.

Littlejohn filled his pipe and as he waited for Cromwell to return, began to turn the case over quietly in his mind. Perhaps this, he thought, might bring to the surface the cause of the vague unrest he had felt all the morning.

Assembling the jigsaw, he saw a picture somewhat as follows:

Assuming a nest of spies, somebody had evidently found Harwood Park flats eminently suitable for the purpose. They were anxious to secure a sole tenancy for their gang and aimed at keeping-out intruders.

Burt's letting-agent had himself said how surprised they were to receive offers of rent in excess of those advertised.

Meanwhile, young Harwood and his pals had started to "haunt" the place. Perhaps this suited the gang, who, whilst unwilling to tolerate continued disturbance, welcomed the preliminaries which scared-off outsiders.

Elaine Freyle was frozen out and left in a hurry.

Braun was suspect as a Nazi.

Edith Pott had been unduly interested in what was going-on over the roads which led to the coast. Troops were now moving over them in large numbers.

Williatt was a mystery man, a cad, and the lover of Edith Pott.

Could Hartwright and the Carberry-Peacockes be mixed up in it, too?

What was the link between the separate tenants who had one trait in common, at least? They refused to be hounded from the place by hauntings and each found a justification for staying-on in spite of it all.

As for Brownrigg, the invisible tenant ... He was apparently a figment created by someone to keep another flat free from unwanted strangers.

And Burt, but for whose death the whole affair might never have come to the light of day.... He was of different mettle from Miss Freyle.

He had sunk his money in Harwood Hall and intended making the place pay. He had arrived in person to lay the ghosts and got himself laid instead.

What had Burt seen going on in the Carberry-Peacockes' quarters when he unexpectedly arrived through the window in his sackcloth suit?

Had he caught them at something which necessitated his being silenced? Who had done the silencing?

As regards poltergeists, it was probable that the Carberry-Peacockes and Edith Pott had created their own to continue the haunting started by the practical jokers. The arrival of Mr. Burt had called for a further display. So had that of Littlejohn. It would not have done for the manifestations to cease as soon as investigators arrived.

Someone had put up a poor show, however, for the electric plugs gave evidence of human agencies, not the violent handling of an unruly ghost.

And yet, there were disquieting doubts about the theory.

Littlejohn got to his feet and began to pace the carpet, leaving trails of smoke in his wake. Outside, he could see a cart loaded with manure entering a field. A woman, apparently an evacuee, pushing a perambulator with one hand and with the other peevishly belabouring a small child walking beside her, passed the entrance gates of the Hall....

Yes. You could drive a carriage and pair through the spy theory.

Suppose Miss Pott and Williatt had merely come sneaking down to Harwood for a vulgar intrigue right under the nose of the elder sister, who was half dotty and didn't know what was going on. In such a case, however, what were the large sums for cash paid into the bank doing in Edith's passbook? Were they honest gains; was she on some good literary line?

Then again, whilst Braun might be an enemy alien after all, there was no concrete evidence of his spying activities.

Hartwright was a mystery and Carberry-Peacocke might be a harmless old buffer, in spite of the fact that he had a son who was a fascist and in gaol for it.

Littlejohn sighed, knocked out his pipe and began to fill another, carefully prodding down the tobacco with his middle finger. A porter from Meadford station passed on a bicycle and in the field opposite, a little, thin, spindle-shanked chap in riding-breeches and walking like a cavalryman, started to shoot rooks....

The end of the case was nowhere in sight. In fact, Littlejohn hadn't *got* a proper theory.

Stone could be heard shuffling upstairs and he knocked on Littlejohn's door.

"Come in!"

"There's a call for you in the 'phone-box under the stairs, sir."

"Can't I take it here?"

"Sorry, sir. All the lines here go through the exchange. There isn't a switchboard. Somebody must 'ave got the 'all from the directory. The separate 'phones is under the tenants' names in the telephone book, but if you want just the 'all the number rings in the box under the stairs."

Littlejohn didn't bother to puzzle it all out, but followed Stone down.

The telephone was installed in a sort of cubby-hole under the main staircase. Littlejohn lifted the receiver. It was Bowells telling the tale of his

fracas with Braun and Co. The bobby reported in precise terms, as if facing the magistrates.

The Inspector's heart grew lighter. At last Braun had made a false step. Even if his labours were harmless, he'd no right to pull out a gun.... And an alien at that. Here was an excuse for focussing the full power of Scotland Yard on the German and his activities.

"What were they doing in the field and culvert, Bowells?"

"I haven't yet had time to h'investigate, sir. You see, they were rough, sir. I 'ad to call in help, as it was. Two Canadian soldiers, sir. We gave it 'em 'ot, sir ... if you'll pardon me."

Bowells sounded to be glowing at the other end.

".... I got a few scratches in the fight, sir. Jest 'ad them dressed and now I'm going back right away to see what's in the tunnel and the field."

"Very good, Bowells. An excellent morning's work. I'll come right over. Where is the place exactly?"

There followed precise directions as to how and where to find the scene of the battle.

Littlejohn hung-up and paused in the telephone-box. Still at the back of his mind was that vague unrest, the stirrings of an idea which might suddenly throw a light on all his problems in this case.

He opened the door and stepped-out into the hall; and then the heavens seemed to fall down on his head. He felt himself swimming in darkness and melting into space. As he lost his grip on reality, from somewhere a name floated into his mind, one which had eluded him all the time.

It all happened in a second of time and Littlejohn lay stretched unconscious on the floor. A foot pushed his great body back across the threshold of the cubby-hole and the door was closed.

THE MAN IN BROWN SHOES

LITTLEJOHN was in no condition to receive the spate of news which greeted him when he recovered consciousness.

They had lain him on the top of his own bed, where the late Mr. Burt's expensive eiderdown voluptuously embraced him and a feather pillow supported his outraged head. They had also removed his coat, waistcoat, collar and tie and lost his collar-stud in the operation. He looked to be recovering from a debauch.

A voice sounding to echo from far distances in an awful void, roused him.

"He's coming to."

He saw Dr. Shortt from Meadford sitting, like the first thinker, by his bed and quizzically watching him through gold-rimmed glasses, his long nose making him look like a bespectacled tapir. Over the doctor's shoulder the anxious, almost maternal face of Cromwell, looking at once relieved and affectionate.

There was a heavy smell of French cigarettes on the air. Even in his persent condition Littlejohn was conscious of a vague nostalgia. He closed his eyes, seeing the bright ripples on the lake in the Luxembourg Gardens and seemed to sink into nothing amid a thousand bright lights and the scent of Marylands.

"He's going off again.... Here, here, Inspector, rouse yourself...."

Littlejohn opened his eyes.

A tall, thin figure approached from the window into the orbit of Littlejohn's vision.

"Hullo, Luc," said the patient languidly. "How are you? Sorry to be like this...."

The newcomer smiled, baring a set of even, white teeth beneath a small black moustache, took and shook Littlejohn's hand in both his own and then patted the back of it solicitously.

“Now ... now ... no excitement,” fussed the doctor.

Luc was a sallow, thin-faced man with a hooked nose and eyes as dark and bright as sloes set in tired sockets. His head was bald in front and thatched behind in short, fine, black hair. He wore a navy-blue suit which looked to have seen better days. There was cigarette ash all over the front of his jacket. A battered Maryland hung from his lips. He never had one out of his mouth. Littlejohn often wondered if he smoked in his sleep....

On his feet, a pair of pointed brown shoes the colour of bananas. They were the first thing which caught your eye, and looked like a cheap line from the bargain basement of the Samaritaine.

“... What brought you here, Luc?”

“Business. I will tell you soon.”

Luc spoke good English, but his vocabulary was basic and hence limited. He chose his words carefully, like a card player who holds a strictly limited hand of trumps and plays deliberately.

“What happened?”

Cromwell could contain himself no longer.

“Hartwright laid you out, sir.”

“Hartwright?”

“Yes. He’s dead.”

Littlejohn rose. Dr. Shortt’s hand on his chest gently forced him back on Mr. Burt’s green quilt. Littlejohn scrambled to his feet on the opposite side of the bed.

He felt awful. His head seemed the size of four and rubber hammers seemed to beat on the tiny tonsure of his crown.

Shortt shrugged and potted like a foraging ant-eater.

“.... Won’t be responsible.... If you faint, don’t blame me. Not much damage done, but you’ll have to take it easy. Drink this.”

Littlejohn swallowed a dose of stuff tasting like gall.

Cromwell benevolently helped him to a chair and poured out three fingers of Burt’s Napoleon brandy.

“Now, now ...” said the doctor.

“That’s better,” said Littlejohn, and everybody, even Shortt, looked pleased.

“Now, tell me all about it.”

Luc squatted on a low chair, stretched his long legs in their narrow trousers across the hearthrug and exhibited the yellow shoes in all their glory. A long cylinder of ash broke from his cigarette and sprayed itself down his front. He looked very pleased with himself.

“Now that it is no more a secret, I can tell it,” he said. “I came to England to confer with your own police about a visit of our Ministers and Staff who are now at a place in Surrey holding a council of war with your own ... your own big men. Dudidier and Bollet and General Chandolin are here. They came by air from Quimper to Brighton. Thence by train.”

“H’m. And you were arranging their safe passage, eh?”

“*Exactement*. We thought it was all safe. I called at your home. Your wife sent me here. I came by auto with your Harrop, of the Special Police, who was also coming...”

“Yes, yes?”

“To my surprise, as our car rounded the ... the concierge’s house ...”

“The lodge...”

“The lodge. Thank you ... as we passed the lodge another car was driving out, the other direction. A man whom I knew was driving ... your Mr. Hartwright.”

“You knew him?”

“*Mais certainement*. A hanger-on of Himmler at one time. Then of the German-American Bund. After that, hanging on Himmler again. I went with Dudidier’s party to Munich in 1938., There I saw Hartwright ... Hartmann he was then. He was serving the Nazi big men as I served Dudidier. A shadow ... detective ... *hein?* I never forget a face.”

“So you followed...”

“Yes. Harrop got out of the car and came here on foot. I turned round and pursued unsuspected. Oho, my Hartmann, what are *you* doing here? I said to myself. Meanwhile, Harrop came on and found you unconscious. He is now turning-up all the rooms in search of evidence. He never rests, that one.”

“And Hartwright, or Hartmann?”

“Took himself to the railway, where a policeman was examining a hole in a field. Seeing him, Hartmann skirted the field, and entered a small tunnel ... a drain, *hein?* ... from the other side of the railway line. I followed. He

was carrying a suitcase and a detonator. It was two o'clock. Dudidier's train was due over the little tunnel at about 2.20...."

"So, that's what Braun was at!"

Luc's eyebrows rose in query. They were singed from constant encounters with his spluttering French matches.

"Yes," broke in Cromwell. "Hartwright must have heard Bowells reporting to you by 'phone. The one in the hall's tapped by a lead-in to Hartwright's room."

"So he coshed me and went to finish the job himself?"

"That's about it."

Luc gazed patiently at Cromwell with a when-you've-quite-finished expression, and then took up the narrative.

"When I saw what Hartmann was carrying, I was in a puzzle.... a ... a ..."

"Dilemma?" said Cromwell respectfully.

"... dilemma. Thank you. Would he hurl the bag of explosives if he saw me or blow up the railway, himself and me?"

Something seemed to tickle Cromwell, whose sense of humour was usually very heavy.

"What would *you* do, chums?" he muttered, caught Littlejohn's eye and wiped the smile from his face with a jerk.

"*Pardon ... ?*"

"Nothing."

"He saw me ... drew a revolver ... So, I had to shoot Hartmann dead. There was no time for ... for ... *les convenances*. Hardly what you would call wicketing, but what would you?" Luc shrugged his shoulders like one in despair.

"Do *you* mean cricket?" asked the doctor, suddenly butting-in with great animation, for he was the captain of the village eleven.

Luc didn't seem to hear.

"You did the right thing under the circumstances," interposed Littlejohn with hasty tact.

"I was wet with sweat of fear when he sank down. Would the explosive go off? If so—BOOM—no Luc."

Cromwell took the opportunity to guffaw loudly and enjoy the joke he was still hugging to himself.

“So Hartwright was in it after all,” mused Littlejohn.

“Sure,” said Cromwell. “The whole bloomin’ lot’s in it, as you said, sir.”

“Carberry-Peacocke?”

“Him too. The man on duty in the grounds nabbed him and his wife levanting through the rhododendrons on their way to the station with two suitcases. They’re cooling their heels in the kitchen till we can *deal* with them.”

Cromwell seemed to relish the idea of the forthcoming interview.

“What time is it now?”

“Half-past three,” said Cromwell pulling out the large gold hunter which his father had given him when he was twenty-one.

“That all? I seem to have been passed out for years.”

“Harrop saw the glass of the ’phone-box all steamed up as he came in.”

“Smart work!”

“Eyes in the back of his neck, that one,” chuckled Luc, who seemed greatly to admire the Special Branch officer.

“You were talking away to yourself in German when you came round, sir,” said Cromwell.

“German? I don’t know a word of it.”

“You were saying something about *an der egg*.”

“Anderegg?” Littlejohn said eagerly and his face brightened.

“That’s it!” he went on. “That’s what’s been bothering me. The tap on the head must have brought it to the surface. Melchior Anderegg ... that’s it. What or who was Melchior Anderegg?”

Cromwell looked alarmed. Shortt seemed apprehensive and rose to his feet. Had the knock on the head been more serious than they thought?

“Melchior Anderegg?” said the doctor. “What are you worrying about? He’s a dead-and-gone Swiss mountain-guide. What has he to do with this affair ...? I used to climb, myself, in my nimbler days. Old Melchior’s almost a legend in mountaineering lore.”

Littlejohn’s face glowed.

“Do you know any Cambridge mountaineers, doctor?”

Dr. Shortt’s nose twitched nervously. He raised his hand in a deprecating gesture and then thought better of it.

“Do you?” persisted the Inspector.

Luc had dropped out of the game and gazed with admiration at his footwear.

“Yes, I think so.”

“Who? Come on, doctor, come on!”

“Oh, Clapthorne, lecturer in histology, and Forrest, the pathologist. Why?”

“Could you introduce me to one of ’em by ’phone?”

“Certainly. But I think you ought to keep calm. Very dangerous....”

“If you don’t stop fussing, doctor, I *will* go off my head altogether.”

“Oh, very well,” said Shortt as if to a wilful boy, and he reached for the telephone.

PROCESS OF MOPPING-UP

ARCHIBALD CARBERRY-PEACOCKE worked himself up into a highly nervous state in waiting for questioning by the police. They made him cool his heels for some time, and he and his wife sat in the kitchen under the watchful eye of a constable whilst Littlejohn and Cromwell searched their flat.

Mrs. Carberry-Peacocke seemed overwhelmed by the plight in which she found herself and spoke no word during the period of waiting. To see the husband she had adored for thirty years, and under whose domination she had always been since first they met, reduced to a gibbering coward was more than she could bear. She was bereft of speech and almost of her wits as well.

The detectives called-in Stone to assist in the search, for it was thought that he might know the nooks and corners of the place which might otherwise escape attention. His co-operation proved worth while. Nothing was found to incriminate the tenants of the flat until Stone remembered the well under the kitchen floor.

“This little place usedter be the buttery in the old times and there was a lead tank for rainwater under the floor, sir,” he said. “When they made them alterations they found it, and the new owner not being willing to fill it in properly, they boarded it over. Quite safe, it was, all the water having been drained off.”

“Show us the place, Stone.”

The janitor indicated the spot and, sure enough, the flooring showed evidence of disturbance.

They prised away enough boards to reveal a neat little transmitting set, which they lifted into the light of day.

Littlejohn then sent for Carberry-Peacocke. When the little man saw the wireless-set he almost fainted. And then he broke down completely and threw himself on the mercy of the police.

"I'll turn King's Evidence," he panted. "I'll tell you all I know. But you'll have to give me protection.... These people are dangerous. Is Mrs. Hartwright about?"

"She's having attention. You're afraid of her?" said Littlejohn.

"She was as bad as he was. Ruthless and heartless, the pair of them. Once we were in their clutches, we were done-for."

Mrs. Carberry-Peacocke uttered a low moan, but sat like a statue, tears coursing down her cheeks and forming drops on the end of her chin.

"It all started with Terry. He's our only son. He's always been an independent sort of a lad and of advanced political views. Once it was communism; then it was fascism. And he got mixed up with the fascist party over here and rose high up in the ranks. Went to Germany, too, and was well received by the Nazi leaders there."

Here Luc strolled in, a cigarette still dangling in his mouth. He looked at Littlejohn and gave him a wry grin. They had always differed in their views concerning the handling of prisoners or suspects. Luc thought Scotland Yard too light-handed with them. Just let him get this little rat in his room in the Sûreté for ten minutes....

Carberry-Peacocke was evidently still proud of his son and resentful of the treatment he was receiving in prison.

"He used to talk to me and his mother about the future they were planning. A sort of Utopia. But first we'd have to clear away the decadents with which the country was overrun, the grafters, the privileged classes...."

Littlejohn was getting a bit sick of this political lecture.

"Come, come. We don't want to hear any more about your political ideas. It's information concerning the gang you got mixed up in that we're after."

"Very well. My son and I were always interested in wireless. We used to run a transmitter before the war and Terry said it might be useful in war-time, too."

"In what way?"

"Don't you see? This war's not country against country. It's creed against creed. Those of one creed are allies the world over...."

The man was half-mad and evidently quite unable to realise the truth when it was thrust under his very nose.

"How did you meet these people?"

“When he was arrested, Terry said I was to keep the transmitter hidden until I got instructions. He didn’t say where they’d come from. One day Hartwright called to see me. Said he’d a message from Terry. I was to take the set to a certain place and put myself at the disposal of Hartwright. I didn’t like Hartwright, but he said he’d information in his possession which would get Terry shot as a spy if it got to the proper quarters. I guess I let myself be led away a bit. I was so confused, losing Terry and our fighting Germany, with whom I thought we’d ally and fight bolshevism. I was doing as they said before I knew it. Once in their hands there was no turning back. They’d have killed us both.”

“So you came down here?”

“Yes. They said this place was very suitable and central for what there was to do.”

“What was there to do?”

“I wasn’t told, but I found out quite a lot. Braun was a proper scientist, but he was a German in the pay of the party. He had two assistants. One a fascist; the other an I.R.A. man, who hated Britain like poison. They went digging in places where they could watch and report on airfields and lines of communications.”

“How did you learn that?”

“From what I overheard and by putting two and two together. I’d nothing of that sort to do. All I did was work the transmitter when it was wanted.”

“So Braun and his men were planning sabotage of railways and such.”

“Yes. And they were to mark hidden aircraft when the bombers flew over from Germany. The roof of their van had a striped pattern which could be seen from the air. They hadn’t got to that part yet, though. They were just gathering information. Their first job was blowing-up the railway when French big shots were travelling to a rendezvous with the British chiefs.”

“Where did you get that information?”

“I’d all day with nothing to do. I used to keep an eye on them from time to time. Overheard quite a lot and sometimes followed them. I was watching when the police nabbed them to-day.”

“So you prepared a hasty exit...”

“I’d had quite enough. Things had gone too far. Then I saw Hartwright dashing off. I knew he was going to finish the job.”

“Who was the head of the gang?”

“Hartwright, here. But there was somebody higher-up outside.”

“How do you know that?”

“Well, they weren’t free-lance, were they? Hartwright got his orders from outside. Braun tried to put-up for boss, but got put in his place.... A bad-tempered piece of work and very domineering was Braun. Sort of rebelled against orders and had to be reminded who and where he was.”

“What about Miss Pott?”

“Oh, the elder had nothing to do with it. Deaf as a post and ignorant of what was happening. In fact, she was useful ... added a respectable air to the place. Her sister was madly in love with Williatt and did whatever he told her. She used to watch the roads to the coast and report on convoys, troop movements and the like.”

“And when you’d got all this information, what did you do with it? Transmit it?”

“Sometimes, if those were the orders. It was coded and sent. The coding wasn’t done here. There again, somebody outside did it. We didn’t always send it, either. There must be other transmitters and they were used in turn.”

“And what were the means of communication with the outside?”

“Williatt. He was the runner, so to speak. Travelled to and from London, just as if he were going to rehearsals, which he was, of course. But that was his cover for contact with the higher men. He’d take information regularly and sometimes he’d come back with code messages for transmission.”

“And now. What happened when Burt was killed?”

Carberry-Peacocke licked his dry lips. In his terror he had released a spate of information in the hope that his punishment might be lightened. The mention of the murder was the last straw. He looked ready to have a fit.

“Might I have a drink of brandy? There’s some on the shelf in the scullery. I’m all in.”

Cromwell went foraging and returned with a bottle of cooking sherry. He gave Carberry-Peacocke a dose and the fellow was too miserable and overwrought to know the difference.

“You’re sure Mrs. Hartwright’s been arrested?”

Littlejohn wasn’t sure. All he knew was that the Special Branch man had gone off with another plainclothes officer to Meadford, where she was supposed to be shopping.

“She’s been attended to,” was all he could say to the terrified prisoner.

“On the night Burt died, we were transmitting. We’d heard all the commotion, but the door was locked, so we carried on, thinking it was Braun, who used to get drunk sometimes and kick up a fuss. Right in the middle of it, Burt climbed in through the window. He was a sorry sight, wrapped up in sacks and his teeth chattering. But he twigged what the set was. Must have known something about transmitters. He said, ‘What are you doing with a transmitter on these premises? Don’t you know it’s illegal?’ And then he rushed for the door and went out.

“Hartwright was after him. He was afraid he’d ’phone the police. In any case, it wouldn’t have done for the secret to get out.... You see, I’m telling you everything. You’ll bear it in mind, Inspector, won’t you?”

Littlejohn said nothing. He puffed his pipe unmoved.

“Well?” he muttered at length. “Go on.”

“Hartwright put out the lights and must have chased him upstairs and thrown him over the balustrade. Burt was dead when we looked at him again. Hartwright got us all together. We arranged the alibis. The poltergeist and all that. Such things do happen, you know, and as there’d been previous hauntings, I concocted another.... In any case, we’d our alibis.”

The wretched man was half demented. He carried on with his torrent of talk and every time he opened his mouth he put his foot in it. His wife sat petrified as he incriminated himself, whilst trying to win the favour of his captors.

The detectives looked at one another. This was something new. Even Luc was flabbergasted at such an easy victim. Under normal conditions, it would take at least twenty-four hours of the roughest stuff in the repertoire of the Police Judiciare to get such results.

“So you don’t know who the big noise of the gang is, eh?”

“Never seen him or heard his name. I tell you Williatt’s the liason officer and never mentioned who or where he was.”

“When you’d killed Burt and scared-off Miss Freyle, you’d the place to yourselves then....”

Carberry-Peacocke was startled and his pallid face flushed.

“I killed Burt? ... I tell you I’d nothing to do with it. It was Hartwright ... Hartwright, I tell you....”

Suddenly, at the window a figure appeared. As if answering the call of a name, Mrs. Hartwright seemed to materialise from nowhere. In her hand

was an automatic and this she pointed at Carberry-Peacocke. There was a loud explosion and a crash of shattering glass. The little informer's mouth opened, his pince-nez fell off, he swayed for a moment on his toes, looked astonished and outraged, like a dog whose master has given him poison, and then crashed to the floor. It all happened in a few seconds. The woman with the revolver was still at the window and raising her weapon a second time to finish off Mrs. Carberry-Peacocke, who had flung herself on her husband's body.

Luc's pistol cracked and Mrs. Hartwright sagged from sight, like a figure on an Aunt Sally stall after receiving a direct hit.

It was dusk when they had cleared-up the wreck and packed-off Mrs. Carberry-Peacocke, now prostrate, to the nearest hospital in charge of a prison nurse. The whole place was like a morgue. Half the tenants in gaol; the rest dead. Only Williatt remained and instructions had been given for the man who was watching him to be finally relieved by an arrest.

The telephone bell in the hall rang stridently. Cromwell hurried to answer it. His face registered astonishment and incredulity.

"No!" he shouted. "Not another! All right. I'll tell him."

He hung up the instrument as though he bore it a grudge.

"Well?" said Littlejohn, who, after his ordeal earlier in the day, was beginning to feel the strain and was sitting resting on the divan in the hall. His bag was packed and he was ready for off to London and home again.

"Williatt's hung himself in his London flat. About ten minutes since. They found him when they went to pick him up."

Littlejohn's head began to spin.

"Look out!" said Cromwell. "He's going over!"

The last straw and the last of the Harwood bunch!

Luc placed an affectionate arm round Littlejohn's shoulders and passed him his flask. The Inspector was soon himself again.

"Let's get out of this," he said. "The place is getting on my nerves."

ANOTHER VICTIM

WILLIATT'S quarters were in the Albany and when Littlejohn and his friends arrived there they found a sheepish junior detective waiting for them. He was the constable who had played the main part in shadowing the playwright. He seemed to think he ought to apologise to Littlejohn for what had occurred.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said as he met the Inspector at the door.

"Whatever for, Cressy? *You* didn't hang him, did you?"

The constable was a young man with a round countryman's face and a head of thick curly hair. He must have expected a severe reprimand for his agitation had given him a tic in his upper lip. Littlejohn had forcibly to tear his eyes from the twitching member, for he felt a great inclination to develop a similar affliction in sympathy.

"The trouble is, he *didn't* hang himself, sir."

"What?"

"The doctor's just left. He said the neck had been broken first and then he'd been hung-up in the bathroom on a curtain cord."

Littlejohn gave the young man's shoulder a reassuring squeeze. The tic ceased as if by magic and the poor fellow smiled again.

They entered the room. The doctor's verdict had loosed a swarm of technicians all over the place. Fingerprint men, photographers, searchers for clues. Among the lot, unheeded, the manager of the bachelor chambers trying to find someone who would promise to keep the tragedy dark and thus preserve the reputation of his property.

The men at work paused in their labours long enough to greet the newcomers and then fell to again.

Sergeant Dunlap, as senior man there, felt himself called-upon to act as spokesman.

"Murder!" he said. "The body's still in the next room. Like to see it, sir?"

He conducted them to where what was left of Williatt lay stretched on a couch particularly quiet-looking for one who had met a violent end. Dunlap chattered like a guide in the chamber of horrors. He was a Littlejohn fan and if the Inspector had ordered it, he would have flung himself through the third-storey window.

“.... When Cressy and I arrived to arrest him, the room was locked. A Yale lock. We couldn’t get an answer although Cressy swore Williatt hadn’t come out. He’d been watching the main entrance of the place.”

“What about the service entrance and the fire escape?”

“The service door gives on to a cul-de-sac at the back, with no way out. Look.”

Through the window they saw a square courtyard ringed by similar tenements, tier upon tier, but with only two breaks. One, the service-door and the other the exit to the street, a wrought-iron gate almost side-by-side with the main entrance. Cressy, from his point of observation in the street, was able to cover both. The fire-escapes ran down to the courtyard, too.

“So somebody entered by the front door and did this?”

“I can’t see any other way, sir.”

The body was that of a man in his early forties. Dark, pale featured, well-groomed. A bit foreign-looking, perhaps, Spanish, with lank, highly-polished black hair and small ears.

“Neck broken, you say?”

“An expert job, the doctor thinks.... Thugs.”

“Eh?”

“The way the thugs did it in India. A cloth or a rope and a sharp twist and....”

Dunlap made a whistling noise through his teeth and jerked his thumbs jack-in-the-box fashion.

“.... and then ... napooh!”

“Anything in his pockets?”

“The usual. There they are.”

Keys, a cigarette case, loose cash. A wallet containing banknotes, a season ticket to and from Meadford, and two or three women’s photographs with one of Williatt himself sun bathing on a lido with a girl whose identity was concealed by sun-glasses. Business letters, a pocket comb, pen and

pencil, card case. Little besides. Nothing connecting the victim with the Harwood gang. Not even a letter from the unhappy Edith Pott.

“Has the room been gone-over?”

“Yes. Nothing revealing. Usual knick-knacks and personal stuff. The fingerprint men have been over everything, too.”

“Any luck?”

“Not a sausage.”

“Dear me! Must have worn gloves.”

“Yes.”

“Have you been into the matter of visitors?”

“Yes. The resident manager can’t help. Nor the hall porter. There are always people coming and going. Nobody suspicious. If you make yourself inconspicuous enough, you’ll easily get past the porter. He’s just a lump of self-important flab.”

Dunlap was a bit disappointed in Littlejohn. His methods weren’t usually so easy-going. He hoped the Inspector wasn’t getting stale. As a rule, a second-hand tale didn’t suit him. He was after facts first-hand and liked to see everything and everybody connected with the case to enable him to absorb the atmosphere of the crime. Now he didn’t seem particular.

“What was the exact time of the crime?”

“The doctor says about five-thirty.”

“Well after the evening editions of the papers?”

“H’m.”

“Then he’d have time to read about the deaths of the Pott women on Devil’s Dyke. Was there an evening paper here?”

“Yes. It’s still over there. The fingerprint men have had a go at it. No good. It hadn’t been opened properly.”

“Get it, there’s a good chap.”

The account of the deaths was in the stop-press. So Williatt hadn’t got any further. Had he ’phoned anyone about it?

“Just enquire from the exchange if there have been any calls in or out this afternoon, will you, Dunlap?”

The sergeant got to work.

Littlejohn and Luc wandered about. The Frenchman was silent, taking everything in with his sharp eyes, but not at home among the calm English methods of Scotland Yard.

"His neck was broken expertly?" remarked Luc at length.

"Yes."

"Maybe the murderer removed his gloves for the *coup de grâce*. If so, the collar at the back might have fingerprints."

Littlejohn called one of the technicians.

"Try his collar..."

The man gingerly took up the article from the table on which the doctor had placed it. He subjected it to the usual preliminary tests.

"Doctor's been at this, too, but we'll soon eliminate him. There's some paper here the doc was handling. We'll get one of his prints from it."

The expert busied himself. Then:

"Yes ... seems to be a foreign print here. Right over the back stud-hole."

"Give it to me, thanks. I'll drop in at the Yard with it."

Littlejohn turned the collar inside out and pocketed it.

"Thanks, Luc," he said with a genial grin at his companion.

They strolled round the rooms. Luxurious in an effeminate way. Thick carpets, modern furniture, surrealist pictures. A case of books, mainly plays and fiction, and a desk. These had been opened and perfunctorily examined. Littlejohn looked through them again. Bills, cheque-books, bank statements of account, business letters. Nothing incriminating on the face of it. The gang had evidently been careful to destroy all dangerous correspondence. It was so in each case. Littlejohn left them to the closer scrutiny of Special Branch or to M.I.5, who would certainly be involved.

Dunlap, who still had his eye on Littlejohn, couldn't get over the Inspector's casual manner. Either he'd something up his sleeve, or that crack on the head.... The sergeant could contain himself no longer.

"Do you know who's done it, sir?" He asked it apprehensively, like the voice of conscience goading a man to his best efforts, or that of a punter begging a horse to put its best foot foremost.

"I've a good idea. The collar will settle it."

Luc fished another Maryland from his pocket and lit it from the mangled stub removed with difficulty from his nether lip.

"Can you reconstruct?"

His mind still ran in Sûreté grooves.

Littlejohn sat astride a chromium-framed chair which looked ready to crumple under his weight at any minute.

“Not precisely. I can guess, though. The visitor arrives. He’s known to Williatt. They talk. Williatt’s seen the news of the Devil’s Dyke tragedy in the stop-press and got cold feet. Have the two women died naturally or been eliminated? In either case, the police will be in the affair with both feet and all over Harwood Hall like bees round a honey-pot. Will the balloon go up on the whole scheme?”

Luc cogitated.

“.... In with both feet ... bees around the honey-pot ... the balloon goes up. He’s got cold feet.... Idioms, *hein?*”

“I’m sorry, Luc. I got carried away.”

Littlejohn put it into basic English.

“.... Then Williatt gets scared. His visitor can’t trust him to keep level-headed....” “Level-headed ... ah!”

“And what happens to a spy his chief can’t trust?”

The telephone rang. Dunlap returned from answering it.

“No calls *out* this afternoon. Two *in* though. From call-boxes.”

“So. Our friend contacts Williatt that way, eh? Presumably rang-up and found him with the jitters ... *les frissons* ... so came in person to make sure what was happening. Maybe Williatt tendered his resignation from the gang and the visitor accepted it in no uncertain way. Caught him napping and strangled him. Then slung him up in a fake suicide. In any case, if the crime *were* discovered, he’d a ten to one ... nay more ... chance of not being detected. His fingerprints aren’t on record ... or so he thinks. And he’s in an unusually sheltered spot.”

“You can lay hands on him, sir?”

“Yes, I think so. He’s probably sitting pretty and quite oblivious of the fact that we’re on his track.”

“Who is it?” whispered Dunlap, like a man giving it up in a game of riddles.

“Melchior Anderegg!” replied Luc mellifluously, his sloe-eyes flashing with benevolent irony.

“You’re getting warm....”

Littlejohn picked up his hat, placed it carefully on his head to avoid the protuberant gift from Hartmann and gently piloted Luc by the elbow to the door. He nodded farewell to Dunlap.

Dunlap's jaw fell as he again doubted the powers of his idol. But he loyally pulled himself together.

"Gosh! I wish I'd got Littlejohn's style, though. Looks like a benevolent uncle and all the time ..."

He took from his pocket a pipe which was the replica of Littlejohn's own and filled it with the Inspector's blend of tobacco....

Outside the two Inspectors stood on the edge of the curb for a minute waiting for a taxi. The blackout obscured the glory of Luc's shoes, but a newly-lighted cigarette glowed irregularly in his mouth.

"I suppose you'll be here for a day or two until the Hartmann business is settled up, Luc?"

"Yes.... I shall probably have difficulty in justifying the pistol shooting."

"Not with me to hold your hand. You'd better stay with us at Hampstead until it's over."

"Very good of you, *mon ami*. I accept, gratefully."

"Always glad to have you."

"Always?"

"What do you mean? Of course."

"One hears things in our profession. All is not well in France. We are very divided.... Some of us may have to get out quickly one of these days."

Littlejohn whistled softly.

"You don't mean ..."

A taxi drew up and they climbed in it.

"You were saying, Luc, about being divided ...?" he continued when they were settled and bowling along to Piccadilly Circus.

"I was saying we are divided. When the war begins properly, I think it will be ... will be ... touch-and-go, eh? Touch-and-go who remains in power, the fighters or the ... the ... quitters. And those who aren't in power will have to leave France ... quickly."

"I know which side you belong to, Luc, and if you ever want a place to lay your head ... you and Madame Luc ... well ... you know where Hampstead is."

Two points of light were joined in one corner of the cab. Another cigarette from the stump of the last, and both trembled considerably. A hand squeezed Littlejohn's arm. There was nothing more to be said. They remained silent until they reached Scotland Yard.

MR. SCROPE ENTERTAINS

LITTLEJOHN took Cromwell with him to Cambridge the following day. He had further investigations to make there and he planned to call on Mr. Scrope, Fellow of Benfield, to acquaint him with developments in the case as promised.

At ten-thirty on the morning after Williatt's death they arrived at their destination. There they parted company for a time whilst Littlejohn pursued his enquiries. At eleven-thirty they entered the gates of Benfield.

The college consists of ancient buildings forming the four sides of a square, with a large tower over the entrance. In this edifice hangs the fine peal of bells presented in the fifteenth century by Abbot William Benfield, founder of the college.

The enclosed quadrangle was a gracious lawn, the turf of which, centuries old, still sprouted green and healthy even at that season of the year.

A few undergraduates wandered about, their gowns fluttering. Two dons crossed from one wing to another, burdened with their own cares and much knowledge. A college servant or two pattered like preoccupied penguins from door to door. A great black cat washed himself in the porch and regarded the visitors contemptuously. A cloistered calm pervaded the whole place....

Littlejohn, already familiar with the ins and outs of Benfield, made his way up two flights of winding and worn stone steps to a short corridor broken by two doors. At the far end, another exit apparently gave access to the bell-tower.

On the left-hand door, a visiting card in a small brass frame:

MARMADUKE SCROPE
Benfield College, Cambridge.

Cromwell stayed behind in the porch. He spent his time in copying the inscription of a tablet he had spotted:

On the night of June 8th, 1645, certain of his cavalry having lodged in this college and destroyed the windows of the chapel, Oliver Cromwell expressed his regrets to the Fellows and replaced the glass from his privy purse.

The modern Cromwell eagerly took down the inscription among sundry other items of criminal import in his black, shiny-backed notebook.

Upstairs, Mr. Scrope twittered greetings and made his visitor welcome. He looked as bright and cheerful as ever.

“A glass of sherry, Inspector?”

“Not so early in the morning, thanks....”

The room was small and beautifully panelled. Cosy, without being expensive or ostentatious. These Fellows knew how to do themselves well! Littlejohn leaned back in a comfortable armchair and stretched his long legs to the fire.

Scrope settled himself and looked more bird-like than ever in anticipation of what was to come. A thrush, this time, with his head gravely cocked on one side, eagerly listening for the sound of worms moving under the sod.

“I was in Cambridge on business and thought I’d call to tell you how things were progressing....”

“And very welcome, too, Inspector.”

“Thanks to your information, we’ve got the whole of the Harwood Hall gang where we want them.”

“*Indeed!* I’m very gratified. Very gratified.”

“Yes, we kept a close eye on Braun’s activities and caught him and his assistants red-handed trying to wreck a train.”

“No! It seems my little hint was very timely, then.”

“Whilst posing as a refugee and vouched-for by your unsuspecting colleagues, he took advantage of his international scientific reputation to act for the Nazi government as an agent. They supplied him with plenty of funds for it, too. The amount of cool cash they let him escape with roused our suspicions before we got confirmation from you.”

“Sure you won’t have a glass of sherry ... or a cigar, Inspector?”

“No thanks, I prefer a pipe.”

Littlejohn filled his pipe and puffed it with enjoyment.

“There was a gang of them working together. A man called Carberry-Peacocke ran a radio-transmitter. An ex-Gestapo man, posing as an American on false credentials, acted as a sort of leader of them. Then there was a play-producer, Williatt, who’d apparently sell his soul for cash, acted as liaison officer between this gang and others of a similar nature. And with them, a poor woman who was so infatuated with Williatt that she was prepared to go to any length to please him. Her elder sister, a deaf lady and quite guileless, was dragged down with the rest, I’m sorry to say.”

“Dear me! Dear me! And what has happened to them all?”

Scrope’s eyes were wide with wonder and he leaned forward like a hen bending to drink.

“Braun and his men are in gaol awaiting trial. The two Misses Pott, the ladies in the case, met with a motoring accident and are dead. Hartwright, whose real name was Hartmann, is dead, too. Shot by a French colleague of mine, who came across him continuing the train-wrecking started by Braun and disturbed by our own police. Hartmann drew a gun and fired on M. Luc, who returned his fire and killed him.

“Mrs. Hartmann, the female of the species and quite as bad as her husband, shot Carberry-Peacocke dead, apparently to stop him talking. She in turn was shot by Luc...”

“Your French friend is handy with his revolver, then?”

“If he hadn’t been quick, Mrs. Carberry-Peacocke, another poor dupe, would have followed her husband. As it is, she’s in hospital, half-crazy at the overwhelming events. Mrs. Hartmann was just winged. A bullet in the shoulder, and will recover, only, I’m afraid, to be hanged as a spy.”

“Well, well, well. Cloistered here in our retreat, it’s difficult to believe that such things go on in the world.”

“Isn’t it?”

“And the remaining fellow ... what was he called? Wilbur?”

“Williatt. He was found hanged in his rooms in the Albany last night.”

“Escaping justice, too?”

“Well ... he did escape it, didn’t he? There was only one way for him, as a spy, you know.”

“A brilliant piece of work, Inspector. Better by far than fiction. I congratulate you most heartily and I’m very grateful to you for coming to tell me the tale of it all.”

“Nothing very brilliant, Mr. Scrope. Ordinary police routine, that’s all. The explosion occurred just because I was on the scene. I wasn’t spy-hunting, you know. Merely seeking a murderer. And my presence on the spot seemed to set the machinery in motion.”

“A sort of catalytic for tragedy, eh? What was the original murder about?”

“As I said, the spy gang were at great pains to secure the exclusive tenancy of a new block of flats in Sussex, the scene of their particular activities. The place was reputed to be haunted. After an incident in which several of the tenants were involved and one in particular left, the owner of the property, a Mr. Burt, went down in person and determined to get to the bottom of the depredations of a so-called poltergeist there. Actually, the poltergeist was, in the first place, a young nephew of the previous owner and his pals, who made up their minds to render an account to Mr. Burt for the dirty trick he’d played on uncle by swindling him out of the family seat. The gang took advantage of the haunting legend to keep the place to themselves.

“In the course of his investigations, or rather, as the result of rough handling by the ‘poltergeist,’ Mr. Burt interrupted what must have been a seance of some of the gang for transmitting messages to Germany. Burt recognised the transmitting-set and thus put the criminals in jeopardy. Hartmann silenced him by throwing him downstairs and breaking his neck ... poltergeist fashion!”

“Dear me! And through going down there, you smoked-out the whole hornet’s nest. That was very clever of you, in spite of what you say to the contrary.”

Littlejohn rose and stood with his back to the fire. Calmly he regarded Mr. Scrope and Scrope beamed back at him wondering what next. It came quietly and surprisingly.

“But tell me, Mr. Scrope, why did you take such trouble to meet me and tell me about Braun? It’s strange that you alone, of everyone I’ve met on this case, knew of his underhand activities.”

Scrope started like a scared hare.

“My dear Inspector! What a strange question. Of course, I wanted to help where I could. I was a keen thriller fan and thought my chance for a little *real* mixing in crime had arrived. I was quite unaware that I’d got exclusive knowledge.”

“Don’t you think you overdid it a bit?”

Littlejohn was still calmly puffing his pipe and warming his back before the flaming logs. He might have been gently rebuking an over-enthusiastic subordinate in his best avuncular manner.

“What do you mean, Mr. Littlejohn? One would think you were trying to pick a quarrel with me.... I can’t understand this sudden *volte face*.”

The man almost whined it.

“Have you still got the manuscript from which you translated the incriminating passages of Braun’s lectures, sir? I’d like to refresh my memory....”

Littlejohn could detect a sudden change in Scrope’s manner. A stiffening of attitude, a frostiness creeping over his customary affability.

“I’ve returned it to my nephew, Inspector. It’s not available. But you must take my word for it.”

“I’m sorry, sir. I can’t do that....”

“Look here, Inspector. It’s time we terminated this interview.... I’m sorry that our pleasant relations are ending thus. I had hoped for many a yarn by the fire now that I know a real detective in the flesh. But after this, I fear I must stick to fiction. I shall poke my nose in no more investigations. I hoped, perhaps, to constitute the noises off, whereas now, I seem to be dragged into the middle of the stage, an unwilling principal.”

Scrope rose to his feet as one who dismisses a class.

“Just a moment, sir. I suggest that the so-called verbatim report of Braun’s lecture was no such thing and that your translation of it was impromptu and made with a view to setting me on the track of and eliminating a man who had become, by his pretensions, dangerous to a certain body in which you were interested.”

“Are you mad ...?”

“Listen, Mr. Scrope. The manuscript you pretended to read to me was no lecture at all. It was the first thing of its type you could lay hands on and was the MS of an article in German by a member of the Cambridge Alpine Club, courteously lent to you before publication by its author, because you

were once a would-be mountaineer yourself and were well acquainted with the subject of the essay.”

“Go on, Inspector. If this is the brilliance of the detective in the flesh, I prefer to stick to fiction!”

“The essay was called *Melchior Anderegg!*”

“Wherever did you get that cock-and-bull story?”

Scrope was now showing signs of uneasy rage and sat down again with a gesture of disgusted exhaustion.

“I got it from Mark Page, the author. I called to see him this morning. As you were turning the pages pretending to find the incriminating passages, I noticed the heading. It struck me as a bit funny at the time, but slipped my mind as irrelevant until afterwards. When I found out that Melchior Anderegg was a famous Swiss guide, I wondered how he came to be mixed up in a lecture by Braun to Nazi students. I made enquiries from the Cambridge Alpine Club, who put me on to Page....”

“Well, if I *did* hoax you a bit there, you can’t convict me for it,” said Scrope at length. “I’d heard of Braun’s subversive lectures and to make my tale more convincing, I pretended to read you a bit of one.”

“Very well, let that pass, Mr. Scrope ... no, no ... don’t get up. I’m not going yet. I’ve not finished. Did you know Williatt, by the way?”

“Preposterous! Never heard of him until you mentioned him just now. What is this?”

“Do you remember giving me a sheet of plain paper on which to copy the extract you were so kindly translating from the Anderegg biography, Mr. Scrope?”

“I think I do....”

“On that paper you also gave me a thumb and four fingerprints. Now it’s a funny thing that an identical print was found just over the back stud of the dead Williatt’s collar when it was examined!”

Scrope rose to his feet. He was no longer like a friendly garden-bird, but took on all the features of an old carrion crow.

“I’ve heard some strange tales in my time....”

“Yes, Mr. Scrope, you’ve been in some strange places, too. For instance, you were once lecturer in Ancient History at Rangoon, weren’t you ...? And you travelled widely in India. You even wrote a monograph on religion.... Thuggee, didn’t you? Do you know that Williatt was killed by

the thug technique? It enables a little man with a knowledge of the tricks of the trade to put 'paid' to one twice his size."

A great hush fell over everything. Scrope bit his forefinger as though pondering a problem.

Outside, somebody started a wireless-set or a loud gramophone ..., Ravel's *Bolero*. *Rumtuntumtumtum, Rumtuntumtumtum*.

"The matter's not going to end here, Inspector, I can assure you. You've made the most outrageous insinuations against me. You can't prove a word and I'll make you pay for it."

"Where were you yesterday afternoon and evening, Mr. Scrope?"

"Here. I've no alibi, if that's what you're after. I can't pretend to keep a third party here during the long hours of study I spend, just in case the police want an account of my movements every time a murder is committed...."

"All the same, I'm going to arrest you, Mr. Scrope, and I have here a warrant for that purpose. I arrest you in connection with the murder of Arthur Willliatt and I warn you that anything you say may be taken down and used in evidence...."

Scrope rose to his feet, crossed the hearthrug and gently tapped Littlejohn on the chest.

"This'll break you, Littlejohn," he said, and then with a sudden burst of vigour, he pushed Littlejohn over the arm of one of the fireside chairs. With remarkable agility he was out of the door and into the corridor before Littlejohn quite realised what had happened.

However, Cromwell, mounting the stairs, blocked the passage of the fugitive Fellow.

Scrope turned, tried the door opposite his own, found it locked and like a mouse, seemed to slide in the opposite direction, bolting through the tower entrance at the far end of the passage.

Littlejohn appeared just in time to see his coat-tails disappearing into the blackness.

"Run down to the main gate, Cromwell, and stop him getting out that way if there's an exit from the tower in the gatehouse. And tell the constable on point-duty to come here, too, with as many of his colleagues as he can muster quickly."

The little door was not locked and there was no key in it. Littlejohn was without a torch and fumbled his way, by the feeble light of a small window below him, down the narrow steps. Another small door, apparently leading into the gatehouse. It was locked. No signs of its having been recently opened. The lock and hinges were rusty and covered in dust and cobwebs. Scrope's way out there had evidently been effectively barred. He must have gone *up* then to the belfry.

Littlejohn followed up the spiral stairs, halting now and then to listen. At length there was borne down to him the sound of scurrying feet, pit-a-pat, ascending rapidly.

The ascent was made in utter darkness for a time. The Inspector wondered if Scrope were making for some complicated exit. Round one side of the tower and down the other. If so, he might give him the slip. But what good would it do him ...? They'd get him wherever he went.

Automatically the Inspector began to count the steps as he mounted.

Thirty-one-two-three-four.... A door slammed above. The darkness began to grow thin and very faintly the strains of *Bolero*, now winding-up for the finish, penetrated the dark steeple. There must be a window or something just ahead.

Forty-four-five-six.... The sound of bolts shooting. Then, through a small room without any doors, but with bell-ropes entering by the floor and leaving through the ceiling. It was dimly lighted by louvers through which the strains of the gramophone percolated.... *Rumtumtumtumtum*.

Fifty-eight-nine-sixty.... Signs of light. A small window in the wall became visible, illuminating a tiny stone landing with a heavy oak door set across it. This was closed and there were sounds of laboured breathing coming from the room behind it. Littlejohn's own breathing was laboured, too. He mounted the last steps..... Scrope spoke.

"Approach the door and I'll shoot through it, Inspector. I'm armed ..." he panted.

"I've no intention of laying siege to you in a place like this, Mr. Scrope," answered Littlejohn. "My colleague will be here shortly and then I shall send him down for a battering ram or the like and break down the door. After that, armed or not armed, I'm coming in for you."

KNELL FOR A TRAITOR

THERE were all the ingredients of farce in the situation.

Littlejohn on one side of the solid oak; Scrope on the other. The Inspector could *feel* his quarry listening, waiting for the next move.

Half humorously, Littlejohn remembered an incident of his early days in the force. Two carters had met head-on with their horses and drays in a narrow street. Unable to pass and neither willing to give way, they had remained abusing each other for two hours until the police were called.... This couldn't go on for ever!

In spite of Scrope's threat, Littlejohn made for the door and threw his weight against it. Abbot William had made a proper job of it. Nothing short of a crowbar, a battering-ram, or a charge of explosive would shift it.

The detective searched in his pocket for a little-used object. His police whistle. It was filled-up with fluff and grit and he had to clean it with a match before it would blow. He went to the window and had a tussle to get it open. The fastening was corroded and someone had given the whole a coat of thick paint to add to the trouble. For the first time, the gadget "for clearing stones from a horse's hoof" in his pocket-knife proved useful. The window opened at last.

Littlejohn looked down. He'd no idea they were so high up. Probably the bells were either behind the closed door or just overhead. Down in the quadrangle, tiny, foreshortened figures were ambling about like black cockroaches. He could even make out the cat, which had been set-upon by a large airedale and was standing its ground in a corner.

The gramophone merchant had evidently turned over his record, for now the strains of the Bacchanalian Dance from the same composer's *Daphnis and Chloë* rose on the still air....

Littlejohn couldn't see a sign of Cromwell or the police. He blew a blast on his whistle, wondering if it would reach the ground. Evidently the sound carried, for two dons and the dog below began looking around to find where

the noise was coming from. He blew again. This time Cromwell and two men in uniform ran from the gatehouse indoors without even looking up. From Littlejohn's perch their antics looked grotesque....

"I'm not coming out, but pray tell me what it's all about."

Scrope had broken silence.

"You know very well, Mr. Scrope. I'm after you for the murder of Williatt, to start with, and then as one of the leaders of the Harwood gang...."

A forced laugh from the other side of the door.

"Wherever did you get that idea? You'll be hard put-to to pin the blame on me, Inspector. What would I want with spies or murdering playwrights? The thing's ridiculous and will make you a laughing stock."

"I'll risk that. I can hear my colleague coming upstairs. I shall send him for tools and break down this door. Then I shall take you along with me, unless you come of your own accord."

"I'm not coming out.... Come and get me...."

Scrope pattered off. Littlejohn could hear him scuffling about like a trapped rat. He wondered what had brought the little don up the tower. Was he going to throw himself down into the quadrangle if he couldn't get away, or had he just bolted into the first funk-hole in a panic?

Cromwell appeared, out of breath and followed by two panting constables.

"All right, sir?"

"Yes. He's cornered in here and he's barricaded the door. Go down and get something ... a crowbar or a battering-ram, and bring it up. We'll have to get him out.... I'll keep guard here.... Hurry, that's a good chap...."

All three newcomers reversed gear and tore downstairs again. In an incredibly short time Littlejohn saw them back in the quadrangle deploying in search of tackle.

Scrope was again behind the door. Listening. At length, he spoke.

"I'm not coming out, but we might as well talk to while away the time. What have you against me? What's suddenly turned you from friend to enemy?"

"You're an enemy of this country, Scrope ... so, I'm yours."

"But where did you get that tale from?"

“I made a few calls among your old colleagues, men who’ve been in your scholastic circle all their lives ... men who were at school with you sixty years ago. You’re not quite as old as you pretended to be when first we met.”

“Has that old dotard Chalmers been talking to you? He doesn’t know what he’s prating about more than half his time....”

“Let me tell you about the man whose career Mr. Chalmers kindly sketched for me, Scrope....”

“Well, there’s nothing criminal in my choosing this secluded spot for confidences and then, when you’ve broken down the door, we’ll see who’s the lawbreaker, you or I. Go on.”

“Years ago, this man was born into a wealthy family. The youngest son of four. All his brothers were great sportsmen and soldiers. He wasn’t. A sickly child, his physique debarred him from the so-called manly life. He was puny and studious.

“His father was disappointed in him. His brothers treated him like a girl and chaffed him about his swotting. The victim made up his mind to get even with his tormentors. He determined to make a name for himself in the world of learning. He soon got the impression that he was a genius. After all, he’d no competition at home. He thought he’d just knock at the door of fame and it would be opened to him. He would outshine his masterful brothers in glory through the power of his intellect.”

“That doesn’t sound like a policeman talking. That’s Chalmers at his best. You’re a human gramophone, Inspector. I congratulate you! The fall of the house of Scrope! Pray proceed.”

“I lay no claim to this psychological analysis. I’ve already told you that I’ve cribbed it from your colleagues.”

“I wish I’d known this. They’d have paid for it, Inspector.”

“They’re patriots, Scrope. When I told them what I was after, they tried to defend you. But when I gave them proofs, they rallied round me. Well, to get on. Our man went to Cambridge, where he certainly distinguished himself in political philosophy and ancient learning. He ought to have gone far, but he didn’t. You see, he was a social failure. He couldn’t lecture and he couldn’t teach properly.”

There was a moan from behind the barred door. The first sound of weakness. It struck a chord of sympathy in Littlejohn, but he repressed his

feelings. Scrope was a traitor....

“Our scholar had spent too much time being teased and bullied by his family and hating them in return. He’d lived too much in his own dreams of power and when he came in touch with reality, his qualities were far below those of many an inferior academic colleague.

“These inferiors got the places. They got the professorships over his head. Their lecture-rooms were filled. His were half-empty. Even his students drifted away without enthusiasm. He was lucky to get the hallmark of moderate scholarship, a Fellowship of his college. Then, in his quiet backwater, he nursed his pride. He had a spell in India without much success....”

“Go on! Go on!” yelled Scrope, in what might have been rage or self-pity. He was like a victim of the rack exhorting his torturers to another turn of the screw.

“Then, he visited Germany. They made much of him there. They were busy pulling the wool over the eyes of Englishmen ... the Nazis were just in power and showing what fine fellows they were. Most of the academic men shied at these baiters of Jews ... but not Scrope. He swallowed the lot ... hook, line and sinker.

“Our scholar’s Fellowship was a passport to the German academies and universities. He gave a series of lectures up and down the country. The idea of dictatorships appealed to him. Just as it did to Hitler, another crank, despised in his youth. Scrope longed for power to strike back at those who’d thwarted and neglected him.

“He lectured in favour of the Nazi creed. Rosenberg even favoured him with his patronage and appropriated portions of his philosophy, passing it off as his own profound and original thinking, as is his custom. Scrope was introduced to Hitler himself.... Then, he returned to England and began once more his studious seclusion.

“His colleagues wondered. Had he been snubbed in Germany? Had he put his foot in it and fallen into disfavour? Had he returned disillusioned and sick of it all? They thought so, at the time. But that wasn’t the case, was it, Scrope? You’d sold yourself to the Germans. I don’t know what they promised you. Perhaps it was money....”

“No ... no ... no ...” came almost involuntarily from beyond the door. Then there was a fascinated silence again.

“Well, if it wasn’t money, maybe when they’d conquered us, you were to become a sort of English Rosenberg, eh? Whatever it was, you became the leader of a cell ... a colony of spies here. There was a university professor of international repute, who could, within limits, poke about the place gathering information on anything from troop movements to balloon barrages under cover of his science. He brought enough money out of Germany to run a factory!

“Two academic men like you and Braun couldn’t be expected to be tough enough to do the really dirty work. So a Gestapo hireling, Hartmann, with his wife, filled the shooting and bullying parts. Then, you managed to rope-in a misguided half-wit of a man who’d absorbed the hate and vapourings of his stupid fascist son and who was half dotty because his boy had been gaoled.

“There was a cad of a bankrupt playwright, too. He’d do anything for money. He became the go-between from Harwood headquarters to the Fellow of Benfield, who received reports, transmitted them in one way or another to Germany, and picked-up instructions by short-wave. These communications were all in code, and even Carberry-Peacocke, who passed them on, didn’t know what they were all about. He didn’t do all the work, though. There’s another radio group somewhere and we’re going to find that.”

There was a chuckle from behind the door again. Scrope sounded to have seated himself on the floor and to be enjoying himself.

“You were interested in codes, weren’t you, Scrope, long before you took up with the Huns? You were a sort of minor Edgar Allan Poe. Wouldn’t admit yourself beaten by any cryptogram. Very useful. In the course of a long association, your colleagues found these things out. They remembered your German visits; your sudden quietness and dismounting from your Nazi hobby-horse. They even recollected your decoding mania and conceit about it. I’d only to put the questions and they recalled a heap of things which seemed harmless enough at the time, but now are very significant.

“Braun, however, got thinking his job was too menial. He’d been somebody at his old university. Here, he was just being pushed around and taking orders. He resented it and wanted to give the orders himself. In fact, he got a bit dangerous. Scrope decided to eliminate him. After all, nobody but Williatt knew who the chief was. Not even Hartmann could get at him,

except through the liaison man. Scrope met the detective who was investigating the case and pretended to know something discreditable about Braun. He made a fuss about digging-out a report of a suppressed lecture delivered long ago by Braun in German and taken down verbatim by a nephew.

“Having found out that the detective didn’t know German, he got careless and gave a faked translation from what he pretended was the lecture. Actually, it was, as I’ve already told you, the MS of an article in an Alpine Club journal.”

Footsteps could be heard climbing the stairs. Cromwell and his men bringing the tools.

“Anything more, Inspector ... anything more?” Scrope’s voice had in it a demoniac ring.

“No. Except that after the whole affair blew-up at Harwood, particularly after the deaths of the Misses Pott, Williatt got cold feet and when you contacted him, said he’d had enough. I told you he was a rat. You couldn’t rely on him....”

“So I discovered....”

It had come at last. Scrope was losing control.

“So you took the opportunity of killing him and trying to fake a suicide.”

The sergeant and his men appeared. They carried crowbars and a portable clothes-stump borrowed from the college washerwoman.

“Right,” said Littlejohn. “Let’s make a start.”

“Just a minute, Inspector,” came from Scrope. He was scuffling in the room at the other side of the door, but chattering the while.

“First, thanks for a most interesting analysis of a poor scholar who hitched his waggon to a shooting-star. Secondly, I think you’re a brave fellow ... I’m not armed—couldn’t use a revolver if you gave me one. But you didn’t turn a hair. I could almost see you through the door. Finally, I’m a great reader of detective fiction. That you know. I’m always furious when the criminal cheats the hangman. It’s not fair of the author and I don’t think it’s true to fact. Perhaps you’ll correct me if I’m wrong. But this time he’s going to cheat you in a most spectacular fashion. No, no, I’m not going to throw myself over the parapet.... Listen....”

There was a pause, and then before they could make a move to batter down the door, they were almost startled out of their skins by the awful

boom of the great bell in the tower. The tenor bell, known as Abbot William, ten tons of metal....

Scrope must have dislodged Abbot William from his set position. Toll, toll, toll echoed from the tower. Cromwell and the men set-about the door....

Down below in the quadrangle, mild pandemonium reigned at this sudden alarm. Students rushed from lectures, several dignified men in gowns, college servants, some air-raid wardens, firemen and policemen gathered and held a hasty conference. Then they hurried, like a party of frenzied tourists, to the ringing chamber on the ground-floor, where, no doubt, another surprise awaited them, for there was nobody there.

It did not last long. Just as the oak door began to give way under the efforts of Cromwell and the constables, there was a scream and a sickening crack beyond it.

Scrope had wound the bell-rope thrice round his neck on the downstroke of the bell and Abbot William had dragged him up on the back stroke with a ten-ton pull, cracked his skull like an eggshell and mangled his body against the rafters. Then he returned to fling him like a bundle of old rags and bones to the floor.

They were glad to get down and in the open-air again.

At the gatehouse, a man in his shirt-sleeves and wearing an apron—probably a baker or confectioner—was indignantly telling a tale to the constable there.

“I tell you, somebody from this college chucked the whole bloomin’ lot into my yard. I heerd it come over, a proper crash. Might a’ killed me, if I’d been there.... Not that I’d a’minded if the stuff ’ad been in good condition. Wireless gadgits are hard to come-by these days and these ’as been good stuff ... proper good stuff. But as it is, it’s no use to me. Somebody’s got to come and clear up the mess. Lucky I’m not claimin’ damages....”

“So that’s it,” said Littlejohn to his colleague. “Scrope had his hidden radio-station in the belfry and bolted to get rid of it when we were after him. I don’t suppose anybody goes up there except the man who oils the ringing mechanism. So he pitched it down in our friend’s backyard. No wonder it’s in little pieces.”

They left the baker still arguing. He was threatening to sue the college for tipping rubbish on his premises....

AU REVOIR, BUT NOT TO EVERYONE

Luc kissed Littlejohn on both cheeks when they parted on the airfield two days later.

“Who knows when we shall meet again,” said the man from the Sûreté to his embarrassed British counterpart.

It was *au revoir*, though. Luc came back with the Free French in the following July.

Other parties in the Harwood case, however, said goodbye for good.

Mrs. Hartwright, alias Hartmann, was executed. Mrs. Carberry-Peacocke is still in a mental home.

Braun's two assistants finished on the scaffold, and one cried “Heil Hitler” before he took the drop. As for Braun himself, he created an astonishing minor mystery which is as yet unsolved. It turned-out that he was not Braun at all!

The anthropologist was known to be sixty or thereabouts. After two days under detention, “Braun” showed unmistakable signs of youth by growing blonde roots to his hair and beard. Deprived of his dyes and other means of disguise, he proved to be a fake. His skill in playing the part of Braun roused a certain amount of admiration, though. With typical thoroughness, the Huns had chosen an agent of the professor's build and general appearance. He must have made a long study of the man he was impersonating, for he deceived those who had known Braun in his heyday. That was not very difficult. They were not a very bright lot and too immersed in other-worldliness.

Perhaps after the war the fate of the real Braun will come to light. Prison, concentration-camp, or death? He was always vigorously outspoken, a trait not forgotten by his impersonator. The latter, a strange sight, his hairy face and head partly fair and partly swarthy, foretold a horrible fate at the hands of his countrymen to anyone who did him violence. The executioner ate a good meal after dealing with him.

Chief-Inspector Shelldrake was delighted with the results of the Harwood Hall investigation.

“A jolly good job.... The Special chaps and the Military Intelligence together are hoping to lay hands on a few more spies, thanks to the diary Scrope left behind at the Safe Deposit. He must have fancied himself a second Pepys. It was all in cipher and they’re busy on it now,” he said.

“Yes, I know,” replied Littlejohn, and Cromwell, who was also present, gave Littlejohn a grateful look, for he thought Shelldrake had a cheek talking to the boss as though he were the only one in the know.

“Judging from the diary,” went on the Chief-Inspector, “Scrope’s character and efforts tallied almost with those outlined in your report. I should say he’d gone potty with being thwarted and through bitterness. Well, we’ll have a drink on it.”

And to the surprise of the other two, Shelldrake unearthed a bottle of whisky, poured out three liberal helpings and spoiled it all by using yellow-looking water from his desk bottle instead of soda. Nevertheless, they parted with a glow of goodwill and mutual esteem.

“And, by the way, Littlejohn,” said the Chief-Inspector in parting, “you’d better take three days off to get over that knock on the head. Lord knows when you’ll get another holiday. Things are warming-up and we’ll want all our forces....”

“Who told you I needed a break? I’m all right.”

Shelldrake didn’t reply, but Cromwell looked sheepish. Littlejohn, catching his subordinate’s eye, melted and left the room with his arm through that of his assistant.

“You’d better take your fishing-tackle and have a rest in the country,” said Mrs. Littlejohn when she heard about it. Her husband had one of his rare fits of excitement.

“I don’t want to go to the country for a rest. I’ve had enough double-sprung hotel beds, food out of tins and joys of the countryside at Harwood to last me a lifetime. I want *your* company for a change ... smoke my pipe with my feet in the hearth, walk on the Heath when the fit takes us, and go to the pictures round the corner when we feel like it....”

“All right, Tom. It’s all right. I was only trying to be helpful. Don’t get excited....”

So they began the holiday at the pictures and were vastly entertained by a M. of I. film showing how idle talk assists foreign agents, followed by the feature, in which a master-spy hounded by a G-man turned out to be a Scotland Yard detective.

“It’s been a rest and a change,” said Littlejohn as they stepped into the blackout again. “What are *you* laughing at?”

THE END

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